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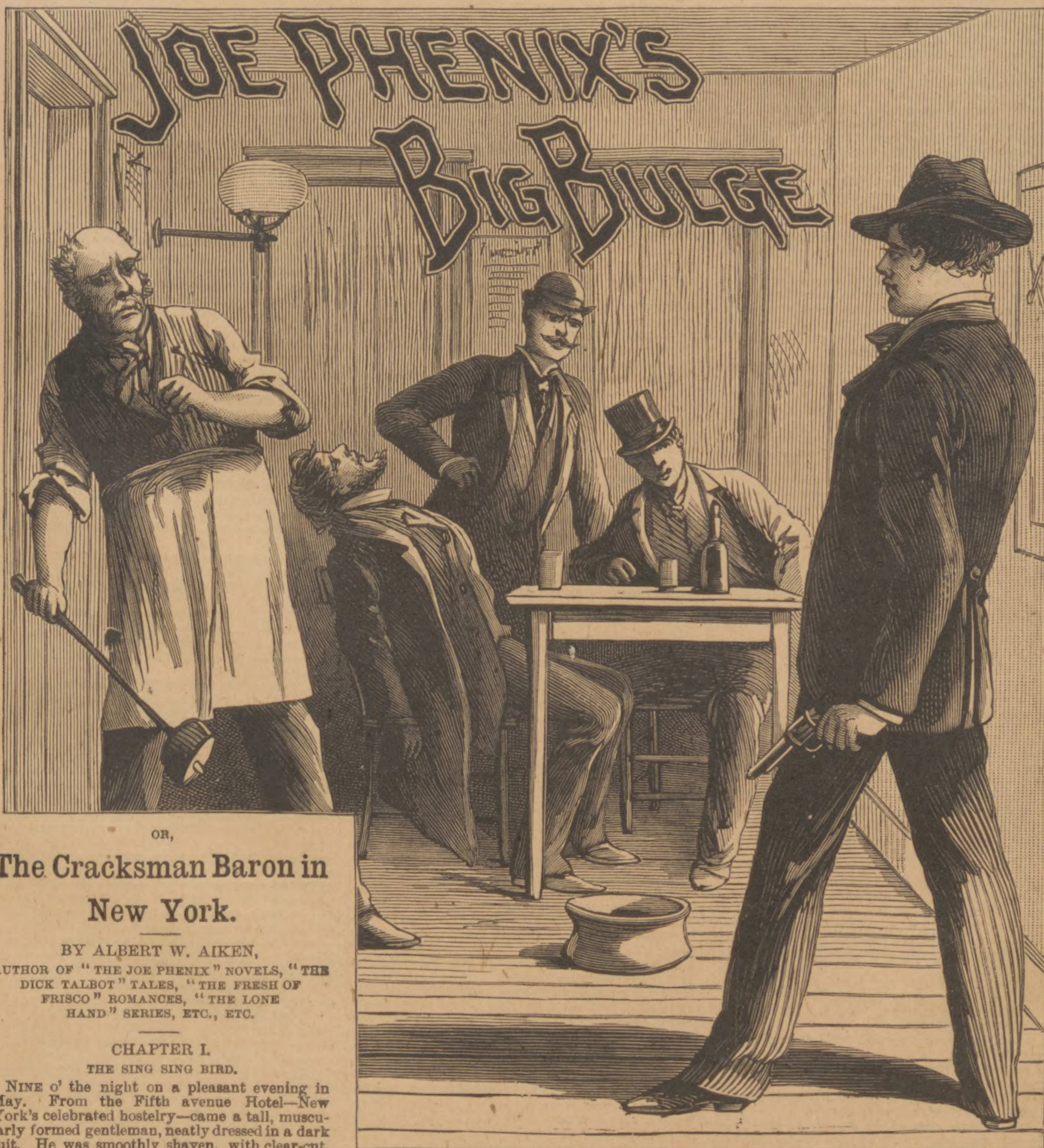
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OR,

The Cracksman Baron in New York.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "THE JOE PHENIX" NOVELS, "THE
DICK TALBOT" TALES, "THE FRESH OF
FRISCO" ROMANCES, "THE LONE
HAND" SERIES, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SING SING BIRD.

NINE o' the night on a pleasant evening in May. From the Fifth avenue Hotel—New York's celebrated hostelry—came a tall, muscularly formed gentleman, neatly dressed in a dark suit. He was smoothly shaven, with clear-cut, expressive features and possessed that peculiar air natural to men used to commanding others.

THE BAFFLED SCOUNDRELS WERE ASTOUNDED. WAS THIS DARING INTRUDER A HEADQUARTERS DETECTIVE IN DISGUISE?

As he came out of the hotel he lit a cigar and then proceeded slowly up the street.

On the next corner he encountered a gentleman who, in body and face, was almost the exact counterpart of himself.

The only noticeable difference was that the second man was a little stouter than the first, had a shorter and rounder face, was a slightly older person, and his features lacked the noticeably sad expression which the countenance of the first one bore.

"Hello, Phenix!" exclaimed the second man as the two came face to face, and stopped to shake hands.

"How are you, inspector?" responded the other.

These two individuals were as notable a pair as the metropolis could boast.

The first—the man with the lion like head and the melancholy air—was the renowned detective, Joe Phenix.

To the readers who have made the acquaintance of this untiring man-hunter through the perusal of the series of tales of which he is the hero, we need not expatiate in regard to his character, and to those who now encounter this indefatigable thief-taker for the first time we will simply say that the metropolis of the new world has never known a more successful man in his line.

The "inspector" was the famous chief of the New York Police Department, Inspector Byrnes in person, a gentleman who stands at the head of his profession.

In fact, it is certain that this police chief has made the best record of any man who has ever occupied the office.

"Been out of town?" the inspector queried.

"Yes, for a couple of weeks."

"I thought so, for I have not seen you around. Are you busy just now?"

"No; trade is slack," Joe Phenix replied.

The man-hunter had originally made his reputation as a detective attached to the Police Headquarters, but had retired from public life after serving the city for a number of years, and set up a private detective establishment in the Wall street district, where he had succeeded in building up a lucrative business.

"If you will drop into my office to-morrow I think I can put you in the way of getting a case which will, probably, pan out very well," the inspector remarked.

"It is a private case," he explained; "and when the parties wanted me to take it up I told them it was out of my line; then I advised them to go to you, but they are a queer lot, and seemed to think if I would put the matter in your hands it would be much better."

"The king's name is a tower of strength," you know," Joe Phenix observed with a smile.

"They probably know all about you by reputation while I am unknown to them," he continued.

"And that leads them to the conclusion that if they can get you to interest yourself in the matter success will be sure to follow."

"Yes, I presume that is the idea."

"Well, I am at liberty to undertake the case so I will call in to-morrow and see you about it," Joe Phenix remarked.

At this point the conversation was interrupted by a man who, coming up the side street, encountered the two.

The new-comer was a short, stout fellow of forty-five or thereabouts, with a smooth, sleek face and a servile air.

He ducked his head obsequiously as he neared the veteran detective.

"Isn't this Mr. Phenix?" he asked.

"That is my name," the man-hunter replied.

"I don't suppose you remember me," the man remarked in a rather embarrassed way.

"Oh, yes, I remember you, although it is about four years since you went into the country. I seldom forget a face, and I have not forgotten yours," Joe Phenix observed in a quiet way.

"I would like to ask your advice about a little matter; and then, too, I think I can give you some information which may be of value to you," the man said, acting as if he was far from being easy in his mind.

"I am at your service," the man-hunter assured, courteously.

"Well, I am not prepared to go into the matter to-night," the man remarked.

"Select your own time," Joe Phenix observed.

"Here is my address," and the detective took a card from his case, giving it into the hands of the other.

"Drop me a line and I will meet you at any time, and wherever you please."

"All right, sir; much obliged. I will not fail to write to you!"

Then the man touched his hat respectfully and departed.

Inspector Byrnes looked after the fellow with curious eyes.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, that person has been in trouble," he remarked.

"You are correct in regard to that," Joe Phenix replied. "His name is Daniel Crickley, an Englishman, and a butler by occupation. He was arrested by me a little over four years ago

for being concerned in a house-breaking affair in Madison avenue.

"There were three of them in the job; this man kept watch outside, while his pals cracked the crib; the inmates of the house were alarmed; there was a fight, and the cracksmen came within an ace of committing murder."

"The evidence was so strong and direct that the jury convicted all three without leaving their seats, but as this fellow did not attempt to resist when he was nabbed—in fact, was not armed at all—he was let off with a five years' sentence, while his pals got ten years apiece."

"I remember the particulars of the case now," the inspector observed. "I was away at the time on my vacation and that is the reason why I did not personally come in contact with the men."

"This Crickley is not such a bad fellow at heart," Phenix explained, "but he is weak and easily led astray; and then, too, he is one of those fanciful men who is apt to imagine that he can do a great deal more than lies within his power."

"One of the fellows who is always biting off more than he can chew, eh?" the inspector suggested, with a smile.

"Yes, that terse expression completely covers the ground."

"I was not surprised at being accosted by the man for I have been expecting him to seek me out. He was released from Sing Sing a week ago and as soon as he returned to the city I was informed of his arrival, for he came down the river burning for vengeance upon me."

"Yes, that is the old story," the inspector remarked.

"There is hardly a crook who, when he is convicted, does not swear to murder the man who put the collar on him as soon as he is released," the official continued. "But there is an old adage which says that threatened men live long, and there is a deal of truth in those few words."

"The fellow is very bitter against me, of course," Joe Phenix observed.

"Like a good many men in his position he blames me for his conviction and imprisonment."

"Never thinks that it is all his own fault!" the inspector declared. "Never takes the trouble to reflect that it would not have been possible for any one to put the bracelets on him if he had not attempted to defy the law."

"Ah, yes, but it is one of the strange contradictions of human nature that men are seldom willing to admit that the misfortunes which come upon them are more usually due to themselves than to any one else," the veteran detective observed.

"Now this Crickley blames me because he was forced to spend about four years of his life behind stone walls, and since he has come back to the city instead of trying to turn over a new leaf he has begun to go again with the old crowd of crooks, and as a number of them have a grudge against me they have talked to this man until they have succeeded in making him believe he ought to kill me."

"Ah, yes; the old game of getting another man to do the work which the plotters are afraid to undertake," the inspector suggested.

"As a rule I never pay much attention when I hear of threats against my life, but this Crickley is one of the dull, dogged kind, and it is possible he may be stupid enough to imagine that he can succeed in putting me out of the way if he could arrange a cunning trap," Joe Phenix explained.

"Yes, he looks like one of these half fanatics who prove to be so dangerous sometimes," the inspector remarked.

"As it happened, the words of the man were reported to me almost immediately after they were uttered," the veteran detective observed.

"You see, inspector, I have always made it a rule to keep on good terms with every 'stool pigeon' in the city, and there is not a man, or woman, of them all who does not understand that I am prepared to pay in the most liberal manner for information, so that when anything of this kind comes up, the chances are a hundred to one that I will know all about it as soon as the witnesses can get to me with the information."

"A very good idea indeed," the inspector remarked. "I do business in about the same way."

"It is very seldom that these rascals ever keep faith with each other," Joe Phenix affirmed.

"As a rule there is always some one of them ready to betray his pals, and so it happens that I am fully posted in regard to the game which this man designs to play."

"Under pretense of wanting to give me important information he intends to decoy me to some isolated spot where he will make an attempt upon my life."

"The man is a bigger fool than he looks or else he would not try a game of this kind!" the inspector declared.

"If he knows anything at all about you he ought to be aware that it will be no easy matter to get a man like yourself in a trap, and the chances are great that in attempting to take your life he will lose his own."

"The man is one of those stolid, dull-minded

fellows who never takes the trouble to calculate closely in regard to a matter of this kind. All he thinks of is revenge, and is determined to rush onward to the achievement of his desire without regard to the consequences."

"How are you going to work the game?" the inspector asked. "Will you grant him the meeting?"

"Yes; for I want to have a little talk with him about a certain matter."

"Good luck to you!" the inspector exclaimed, and then the two parted.

CHAPTER II. ON THE PIER.

JUST four and twenty hours after the time when the meeting between the great chief of the New York Police Department and the leading man-hunter of the city took place, Joe Phenix made his appearance on one of the up-town piers of the North river water front of the metropolis.

It was a lonely spot after the shades of night had fallen.

The pier was a long one, stretching well out into the river, and as it was rather too far up-town to be desirable for shipping, there wasn't a craft moved to the wharf.

The night was rather dark, although there was a moon, but it was on the wane, and the face of the sky too was thick with clouds which served to obscure the light of Madam Luna.

The North river, he it understood, is the local name for the majestic Hudson.

The veteran detective cast a rapid glance around as he stepped from the street onto the pier, and as he possessed the quick eyes of a hawk he did not fail to notice that there were three or four men skulking in the shadows of the corner house opposite to the pier.

"Those are the fellows who are going to cut off my retreat, I suppose, in case I succeed in getting the best of the Englishman," Joe Phenix murmured.

"I am afraid they are doomed to a disappointment, though," he continued. "For it is my idea that this affair is not going to turn out in the way that they expect."

"This is an uncertain world, and the best laid schemes of mice and men often fail."

As the veteran detective advanced out on the pier, he was able to see that there was a man sitting on the string-piece at the extreme end.

"There is my man, undoubtedly," Joe Phenix murmured, as he caught sight of the dark figure outlined on the end of the pier.

"And as he sits there he reminds me strongly of a spider, crouching in his web, waiting for the approach of his victim."

But though he doubtless fondly flatters himself that I am going to play the role of a fly, yet before he gets through with this proceeding, I have an idea that he will come to the conclusion that I am much better fitted to enact the part of a spider than he is."

As the detective had anticipated, it was the Englishman, Crickley, who sat on the end of the pier.

He arose as the detective came up, and just at that moment the moon went in behind a cloud, so her light was dimmed.

"You are right on time," the Englishman remarked.

"Oh, yes, you can always depend upon me," Joe Phenix replied.

And then, with a tiger-like movement, he sprung upon the other.

The Englishman had his right hand in the pocket of the loose sack-coat which he wore.

The man-hunter grasped this hand by the wrist, and at the same time caught the Englishman by the throat.

Joe Phenix was wonderfully muscular, a perfect Hercules, although not appearing to be one-half as strong as he really was, and the Englishman became as helpless in his grasp as though he had been a child.

The firm grip upon his throat so compressed Crickley's windpipe that he was not able to give a cry of alarm, and as soon as the veteran detective had the fellow half-strangled, with a dextrous movement, he drew the hand from the pocket and, as he anticipated, it clutched a revolver.

"Aha! it was your game to assassinate me!" cried Phenix.

This he seized, and releasing his hold on Crickley's throat allowed the man to go down all in a heap; then the man-hunter seated himself on the string-piece, took a look at the revolver—it was a cheap, double-action tool, a self-cocker—and waited for the man to recover from the rough usage which he had received.

It was a good five minutes before the Englishman revived sufficiently to speak.

"What did you do that for?" he gasped.

"In order that we should be able to converse with perfect freedom," the veteran explained.

"I don't understand what you mean," the Englishman remarked sulkily rising and taking a seat upon the string-piece.

Phenix was sitting upon the end of the timber structure, with his face to the shore, so to see if anybody came upon the dock from the street. He did not intend to be surprised.

"Well, it was my opinion, you know, that we

could not talk very well as long as you had this loaded revolver in your pocket, and I knew you would shoot me as soon as you could get a convenient opportunity."

The Englishman stared blankly at the detective, he did not know what to say.

"Are you surprised that I should get such an idea into my head?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Yes; I don't understand it," Crickley asserted, doggedly.

"Well, you see I am an old hand in the detective business, and so have an extensive circle of acquaintances, particularly among men who have been unfortunate enough to drift into trouble, and as some of these men have received favors at my hands when they hear of threats being made against my life, it is only natural that they should come and tell me all about it."

The underjaw of the Englishman dropped and he looked at the other speechlessly.

"You understand, Crickley, you have been talking pretty freely of what you intended to do to me, and although you believed you were conversing with pals who could be trusted, yet it must now be apparent to you that some one of the gang has given you away."

"It is only natural that I should be anxious to get square with you!" Crickley exclaimed.

"Because I was instrumental in having you sent to prison?"

"Yes; just that."

"Don't you think, now, that you, yourself, were more to blame for your imprisonment than I was?" Phenix asked.

"I to blame?" repeated the other in surprise.

"Exactly; if you had not been weak-minded enough to go in with a lot of crooks, no one could have sent you to jail."

"A man might as well blame the fire for burning his hand when he is fool enough to expose it to the blaze, as to go into crooked work and then become enraged at the officer who arrests him."

It was evident from the expression on the Englishman's face that he had never thought of the matter in this light, and he pondered over the detective's words for a few moments.

"Well, I don't know but what there is a deal of truth in what you say," he admitted.

"I suppose that if I hadn't gone in with the crooks, I could not have got into trouble."

"That is certain!" Joe Phenix declared. "A man like yourself, who can make a good living in an honest way, is very foolish indeed to allow himself to be mixed up in every crooked work."

"Yes, I suppose I was not wise," Crickley observed, slowly.

"I know the whole history of your case, Crickley," the veteran detective observed. "And it is the same story which I have heard so often before."

"Liquor is at the bottom of the whole affair, and now, after you have been shut away from the world for four years, as soon as you got to the city you again sought out your old associates, and, in spite of the warning which your four years' imprisonment ought to have given you, are about to again embark on a career of crime."

"I have not agreed to go into any job yet," the Englishman retorted, in a sullen way.

"Yes, but you will join in with the crooks in time—join in with the men who put you up to undertake this job, and you are weak enough to believe that these fellows are your friends," Joe Phenix exclaimed.

"Well, they act as if they were," Crickley argued.

"Because they sympathized with you and said that I ought to be killed?" the veteran asked.

"Can't you see that these men are making a cat's-paw out of you?" Phenix demanded.

"Don't you understand that though the fellows both hate and fear me, yet they do not dare to attempt to attack me, but they think they are working a fine game by urging you on to kill me."

"If you succeed they will be glad, for I have been a thorn in the side of some of them for years; and if you don't, and I lay you out, then they will laugh among themselves because you were fool enough to attempt to do the job that old experienced crooks were afraid to undertake."

The words made a deep impression upon the Englishman, and he shook his head in a grave way.

"I don't know but what you are right," he admitted; "I don't suppose I would have gone into this thing if some of my associates had not urged me to revenge myself."

"Exactly! They wanted you to do their work for them. Made a cat's-paw out of you, just as I said," the detective repeated.

"There is an old saying, you know, in regard to their being honor among thieves, but there is a mighty little truth in it, for the average rascal is always ready to be ray his comrade if by so doing he can either secure his own safety or get a good bit of money by turning traitor."

"Now take this case of yours," Joe Phenix continued, "I knew what your little game was before you attempted to work it."

"I was aware that you intended to decoy me to this lonely spot, under pretense of being able

to give me some important information, and then with a revolver ball close my account with this world; but, as you are now aware, the game can't be worked."

"You are right—you have got the best of me," the Englishman said in a sullen way.

"Simple because I was posted in regard to your plans and so was able to take measures to defeat them," the man-hunter remarked.

I also understand that there are three or four crooks lounging on the corner near this pier, ready to come to your assistance if you appear to be having a hard time with me, to prevent my escape if I should break away from you and attempt escape by flight."

The Englishman looked at the bloodhound in amazement.

"You see I am well-informed," with a smile.

"Yes, it is plain I have been betrayed," Crickley responded.

"And as you confided your plans to about a half-a-dozen different men it is hard work for you to fix upon the particular one who has played the traitor."

"That is true, I haven't an idea as to who the man is."

"And I cannot tell you, of course, but you see I am posted in regard to all the facts of the case."

"Yes, that is evident."

"You see, Crickley, that although in the discharge of my duties I am sometimes obliged to hunt a man down as though I was a veritable bloodhound, yet the moment the chase is done I bear my man no malice—on the contrary, I will go out of my way to help him if he needs help."

"I have heard some men say so, but I will be honest with you and declare that I did not believe it," the other remarked.

"That is because you only know me as the bloodhound, but now I am going to show you the other side of my character."

"You have had a hard time of it for four years, and if you had not been a good prisoner, giving no trouble, you would have had to serve out your full term of five years," the man-hunter continued.

"Now then, I believe that you can make a man of yourself again if you will only agree to let liquor alone."

"Yes, I know that the drink makes a fool of me," Crickley admitted.

"You must not touch it then."

"Oh, I am all right except when I get in with a crowd," the Englishman explained.

"I can take my beer without its bothering me any," he continued. "I have been used to it all my life, but it is when I get in with a gang, and go to drinking whisky that the devil gets into me."

"Let the whisky alone, and I will agree to make a man of you again."

"Well, I will try," the Englishman responded.

"I don't know as you understand about the matter, Crickley, but there are two kinds of crooks in this city; the crooks who plan, and who always get the lion's share of the plunder, and the crooks who do the work, who are the fellows that usually are caught if the affair goes wrong."

"Yes, I comprehend, and if I go in with a gang I will be reckoned as with the latter class."

"Correct! and you are certainly bound to get more kicks than coppers."

"The leaders of the gang will use you as a tool, make money by your work and then leave you to suffer if you are unlucky enough to get caught."

"Well, I don't suppose that I do stand much of a show," Crickley admitted.

"The gang that you think of joining is one that I have been after for some time, but the head men have managed so cunningly that though I have caught some of the tools, yet I have never been able to get at the bosses," the veteran detective explained.

"I understand that through the influence of one of these bosses you have got a position as butler in a Fifth avenue family; there is some game afoot, of course, and I want a finger in the pie."

"Now, then, Crickley, you will come out a deal better in the end if you serve me instead of serving the gang, for I can and will protect you. What do you say?"

CHAPTER III.

AN AGREEMENT.

THE Englishman pondered over the matter for a few moments and then answered:

"Well, I suppose nine men out of ten would jump at a chance like this, but I must admit that it rather goes against my grain to betray the men who trust me."

"There is something in that," the detective assented; "and I do not think any the worse of you because you have scruples of this kind; but before you come to a decision you must examine all the facts in the case."

"It is not really necessary that you should become a stool-pigeon for me, or that you should have anything to do with the crooks at all."

"Oh, yes, I know that."

"If you keep away from them I will not have any use for you."

"Certainly not."

"The crooks want you to join them of course," the man-hunter remarked.

"You have been in trouble, and the men who lead crooked lives do not like to see a man who has ever done time turn over a new leaf and try to lead an honest life."

"Yes, that is true! They argue that a man is a fool to be content to plod along and save his money by the single dollar, when by one bold blow he can make a hundred!"

"That is the old argument, and they always forget to count the chances of getting caught, and the records of crime show that not more than one man out of a hundred succeeds in escaping with his ill-gotten gains in the long run, and of the few who do succeed in escaping the police there is hardly one who doesn't throw his money away so lavishly that even if he has succeeded in landing a big stake, he is forced to a crooked life again."

"Yes, I believe you are right," the Englishman assented.

"And another point which I presume they did their best to impress upon you," Joe Phenix continued.

"When they argued that, as you had once been in trouble, you would be foolish not to keep on in a crooked life, they probably told you that even if you wanted to lead an honest life, the detectives would not allow you to do so."

"Yes, they did say so. They declared that I would be hounded out of every place that I secured."

"In regard to the hounding, there is a good deal of that done, but not by the police or the detectives," Joe Phenix declared. "The men who do work of that kind are the crooks themselves—fellows who are so radically bad that they could not be honest if they wanted so to do."

"Such men hate to see a poor fellow who has been once in trouble rise from the dead ashes of the past to better things."

"The police and detectives, on the contrary, are always glad to learn that a man has reformed, for it means so much less work for them."

"Well, that seems reasonable," the Englishman admitted.

"Of course; and you can be sure you will have no trouble so far as the police and the detectives are concerned."

"Now, understand, Crickley, the crooks care for you, only because they think your services will be valuable," Joe Phenix continued, "but I can tell you the odds are a thousand to one that, if you go in with them you will go up the river for another term."

"Yes, I know there is always danger of that kind, but a man must expect to take his chances."

"Now, as the case stands, you are not obliged to either go on with the crooks or to act as a stool-pigeon for me. There is another course open to you. Leave New York; go to some of the big western cities where you are not known and will not be apt to meet with any of your old acquaintances, and there you can begin a new life."

"No one will know of your past career and you will be free from the fear that you will be denounced as a released convict."

"Perhaps you have not got the money to make this new departure," the veteran added. "If so don't let it trouble you; I will lend you money to get you to your destination and to live there until you procure employment."

"You will get work easily enough; you are capable and understand your business, and when you prosper you can pay back the loan."

For a full five minutes the Englishman sat, buried in thought, his eyes bent on the ground, then he abruptly raised his head and looked the man-hunter full in the face, and upon his countenance shone an expression which Joe Phenix had never seen there before.

"Sir, you have made me the best offer I ever received and I am grateful for it, but I am not going to accept, for all that," he declared.

"How is that?"

"Because I begin to see clearly; I have been a fool!" the Englishman declared, with bitter accent.

"You certainly have not been wise."

"Yes, yes, it is all plain to me now that these rascals have played a deep game. I was an honest man when I made their acquaintance, and have never done anything wrong in my life, but these rogues got me to drinking on purpose to get me in such a condition that they could use me."

"That was their game."

"And now they do not intend I shall escape from their clutches."

"It really looks as if they had calculated in that way."

"They have had no mercy upon me, for they have ruined my life; why then should I have mercy upon them?" Crickley demanded fiercely.

"They are certainly not entitled to any as between man and man."

"You are right, and as the scoundrels have ruined me I will do the best I can to ruin them."

"Very good! you will act for me then?"

"I will!"

"What is the position they have secured for you?"

"Butler for a Mr. Jonathan Mullett, a very wealthy man, I believe, who lives on Fifth avenue by Central Park."

"Who got you the place?"

"I was told to apply for it by a man named Fred Monseton who keeps a saloon in Houston street. English Fred he is called."

"I know the man—his saloon is headquarters for crooks of all descriptions. Did English Fred tell you that you were to take the position so as to be on hand ready for a job?"

"Well, he did not say so right out, but he hinted that in time a big game might be worked in the house."

"Did you get the place without any trouble?"

"Oh, yes. Some one it seems had given me such a strong recommendation that the old gentleman, Mr. Mullett, who seems to be a queer sort of a chap, engaged me immediately, and I am to go to work to-morrow."

"Do you know who it was that gave the recommendation?"

"No, but I suppose I can find out."

"I wish you would. It will be an important bit of information for me, I think."

"All right. I don't doubt but what I can."

"It is understood, then, that you will act for me?"

"Yes, I will."

"And I will see you safe through all harm," Joe Phenix declared.

"Now, then, we must arrange to pull the wool over the eyes of those fellows on the shore," the detective continued. "I want them to believe you have succeeded in your game. They must get the impression that you have succeeded in killing me. That will make you solid with them."

"Yes; but how are you to arrange the matter?" the Englishman asked, full of curiosity.

For answer, the man-hunter leaned over the edge of the dock, and speaking down into the gloom beneath, asked:

"Are you there?"

"All right!" replied a muffled voice, coming from under the pier.

"What does this mean?" the Englishman asked, in astonishment.

"A comrade of mine is in a boat under the pier. I will drop into the boat, and as soon as I am out into the stream you will fire a revolver. Then I will cry out as if hit."

"I see!"

"At the report of the shot and my cry the gang undoubtedly will hasten to your assistance, when you must tell them how you caught me off my guard and finished me with a shot while I tumbled from the pier into the river."

"That yarn ought to go down all right," Crickley thought.

"I think so. For a time I will be missing so that everybody will believe that I am really dead."

"I see."

"Now I will be off!"

Joe Phenix dropped into the boat, then gave the revolver to the Englishman, who waited a couple of minutes until the boat had vanished in the gloom under the silent strokes of the muffled oars, and then he discharged the revolver.

CHAPTER IV.

A TOUGH GANG.

SHARPLY rung out the report on the still night air, and there followed a cry as of some one stricken with mortal agony.

Both the sound of the shot and the cry of pain were heard by the fellows lounging in the shadows of the corner house.

There were three of them—three men well-known to the police, for they were the principal members of a gang which had given the blue-coated guardians of the metropolis much trouble.

And three better representatives of the genuine New York toughs could not have been found within the city limits.

"The Bandy-legged Rangers" was the name of the organization to which they belonged, one of the social clubs so common to the great city, who had a target excursion once a year, gave balls during the Winter.

The police though had an extremely poor opinion of the "Rangers," and although the young men who composed the organization pretended to be hard-working citizens, the officers declared that the majority of them were no better than a lot of thieves and only worked at intervals so as to cover up their true vocation.

The "Hay Gang" was the name that the policeman applied to them, on account of their having their headquarters in a rickety old barrack used for the storage of hay situated on one of the side streets leading from the river, in the neighborhood of the great west side wholesale market of the metropolis.

As we have said, the three men lounging in the shadows of the corner house were the leaders of the gang.

The chief of the three was a well-built al-

though slender young fellow of two and twenty, with a hard face and a defiant air.

Michael Murphy was his baptismal appellation, but in some mysterious way he had acquired the nickname of Green Murphy, and he was seldom called anything else.

One of his companions was a short, thick-set fellow, not over eighteen, but drink and dissipation made him look a dozen years older than he really was.

The other was tall, thin and sharp-faced, with a decidedly evil look, and a good judge of human nature would have immediately decided that he was a man who would not hesitate to commit murder for an extremely small cause.

A desire for revenge, or a thirst for money would be amply sufficient to impel such a man as this to commit a desperate deed, provided there was a fair chance for him to escape so he would not be taken red-handed in the act.

The first of the pair answered to the name of Billy Divers while the tall, thin fellow was called Long Jerry Donegan.

The three were on the alert, and the moment the sound of the pistol-shot fell on their ears they peered eagerly toward the dock.

"Aha! do you hear that!" Green Murphy cried.

"Oh, yes!" his companions responded, immediately.

"That looks as if the bloke has done the job," Green Murphy declared.

"Oh, yes, he has gone for him with a gun," Billy Divers observed.

"Well, as for me, I am not dead stuck on this gun business," Long Donegan observed, with a grave shake of the head.

"The barkers make too much noise to suit me," the rough continued. "For a job of this sort a knife is the tool to do the work."

"Oh, no, this bloke would never have been able to do anything with a knife," Green Murphy declared. "I didn't think he would have the pluck to do the job, anyway, and the only chance he had was to take the fly-cop unawares, for if the peeler ever got a notion of what he was up to he would be apt to break the cove's back."

"But come on, and let's see how he is working the trick," he added.

Then the three ran across the street and out on the pier.

The gloom was so thick that the toughs were not able to distinguish whether there were two men on the end of the dock or one until they got within a hundred feet of where the pair had stood, and then they saw that the detective had disappeared.

The Englishman was bending over the string-piece, looking down into the dark water.

"He has done the fly-cop for sure!" Green Murphy exclaimed, as soon as he discovered that Crickley was alone.

The Englishman rose to his feet and turned to meet the three as they came up.

"Did you settle his hash?" Green Murphy asked.

"Oh, yes; I don't believe he will ever trouble anybody again unless he has as many lives as a cat," Crickley replied.

"Did you get a chance to sock it to him on the sly?" Billy Divers asked.

"Yes; I had my revolver in my pocket so I could slip it out without any trouble," the Englishman explained, "and after I got him interested in a cock-and-bull story about a job that some crooks wanted me to go into, I pretended to hear a noise, and asked him if there was somebody sneaking up on the pier."

"That was to get him to turn around so you could git a crack at him, hey?" Green Murphy asked very much interested in the recital.

"That was my game and I worked it to the queen's taste!" Crickley declared.

"He was standing right by the side of the pier and when he got the dose he gave a yell and tumbled overboard."

"I don't think there is much doubt but what you have settled him all right," Long Donegan declared.

"The tide is on the ebb and running out strong and if your bullet didn't finish him the water will, for a man has got to be a good swimmer to be able to take to the water from the end of the dock in a tide like this and make the shore all right, and a bloke with a bullet in him wouldn't stand any show at all."

The speaker had lived "along-shore" all his life, had been connected with a half-a-dozen gangs of "river-rats," as the thieves who prey upon the shipping in the harbor are called, and so he was an authority in regard to all appertaining to the water.

"Well, it is a good riddance to bad rubbish!" Green Murphy exclaimed.

"The bloke never happened to collar me," he continued. "But I have known of his sending some extra good men up the river and I don't believe there is one of the fly-cops who has done better work."

"He hounded me into the State Prison," the Englishman remarked. "But now I think I am even with him."

"Oh, yes, you are dead right about that and no mistake!" Green Murphy declared.

"I read in de newspaper once that some blokies said that the only good Injun was a dead Injun, and I think it is about the same way with these fly-cops, the only good fly-cop is a dead fly-cop!" And then the fellow burst into a loud laugh, evidently considering that he had made a very witty remark.

"This man will not trouble anybody unless he is lucky enough to get out of this hole into which I have put him, and I think the chances are big that he will not be able to do that," Crickley observed.

"We came out to give you a hand, old man," Green Murphy said. "For if you had not succeeded in putting him out of the way at the first clip, the odds are big that you wouldn't have been able to get away with the bloke, for he is an awful tough customer to handle."

"I claim to be a good man myself," he continued. "And when it comes to a scrap I kin hold my own with 'most anybody I run up ag'in', even if the man is thirty or forty pounds heavier than I am, but one night when me and two other fellers run across a well-dressed bloke with a load on, and were going through him, this blamed Joe Phenix showed up."

"And he went for us, too!" Billy Divers chimed in. "And he went for us, too, red-hot, although we were three to one."

"You bet he did!" Green Murphy declared.

"And we tried the bluff act on him, too," Billy Divers added.

"It was a lonely place, and as there were three on us, we thought we could stand him off," Green Murphy explained.

"So when he wanted to know what we were doing, I told him to go chase himself around the block if he didn't want to get into trouble."

"You see I made the mistake of thinking that he was jest some ordinary, every-day bloke," the tough continued, "and I thought I could scare him off, but he didn't scare for a cent."

"No, sir-ee!" Billy Divers exclaimed. "Not for half a cent."

"He didn't waste any time in talking, but sailed right into us like a thousand of bricks," Green Murphy affirmed.

"I was the nearest to him, and got a clip in the chin which made my jaw sore for a week," the tough continued.

"And I got a smash between the eyes which h'isted me clear from the stoop, where the bloke was that we was a-going through, into the gutter, and you kin bet your sweet life that I saw more stars than I ever did in the sky."

"The other fellow didn't wait for his lick but put out as fast as he could, and we sneaked after him for we had got all we wanted," Green Murphy asserted.

"The next day one of the gang got 'pulled' and when we went to the police court to help him along we discovered who it was that laid us out," the tough said in conclusion.

"He was the man that put me behind the bar, but the account is squared now, I think," the Englishman remarked.

"And a good job it is too!" Green Murphy declared.

The others agreed to this and then the party left the pier.

At the corner of the street they separated, the Englishman going one way the toughs another.

CHAPTER V.

CAPTAIN LE NOIR.

ALLOWING the young fellows to go on about their business we will follow Crickley.

He went up the cross street until he came to the Elevated Road, there he took a downtown train in which he rode southward until he came to the neighborhood of Bleecker street where he alighted.

Up Bleecker street he proceeded until he came to the cosmopolitan quarter in the neighborhood of Broadway.

This part of the metropolis is chiefly occupied by foreigners, principally Frenchmen, Germans and Italians.

Saloons and restaurants abound, more or less respectable.

Crickley directed his steps to a rather dingy-looking, two-storied, old-fashioned wooden house in the lower part of which was a saloon and restaurant combined, after the foreign fashion.

The sign over the door announced that it was the Hotel de Colette.

The Englishman entered.

Behind the bar was a middle-aged Frenchman, enormously fat, a great, gross fellow with a full gray beard and hair, which, being cut short, stuck up all over his head like a pig's bristles.

A lad of sixteen or seventeen, so strangely resembling the old man that a glance showed them to be father and son, assisted the elderly Frenchman behind the bar, and also waited upon the customers at the tables.

Crickley cast a curious glance around as he entered, and it was evident from his manner that it was the first time he had ever been in the place, then he went to the bar, where he was received by the host with an elaborate bow and a smirking smile.

"What can I have as pleasure of doing for my noble friend?" the old Frenchman asked.

speaking extremely good English, only a slight accent betraying that he was a foreigner.

"I came to see Captain Le Noir," Crickley explained, casting a look around as he spoke as though in search of the man.

"Ah, yes, yes!" exclaimed the old man rubbing his hands together briskly.

"You are a friend of Captain Le Noir? Ah! that is good! All in my house and myself are at the captain's command."

"Mon brave captain! It does my heart good to meet with any friend of a man who is so dear to me as Captain Le Noir!"

"He told me that I would be apt to find him here at about this hour," the Englishman remarked, with a glance at the clock on the wall behind the bar.

"Ah, yes, he does my poor house the honor to pay it a visit at about this time in the evening," the fat Frenchman remarked, drawing out an enormous silver watch and consulting it.

"But, dear gentleman, the captain does not sit here in public in ze saloon, you understand," the host continued.

"He is one grand gentleman, and always has a private room where he sits with his friends."

"Yes, I understand."

"My son will show you to the room."

"Much obliged."

"Oh, no! it is nothing!" the old Frenchman declared in his theatrical way.

"It makes my heart glow with pride to be able to do a service to any friend of the noble Captain Le Noir!" the old fellow declared.

And then he leaned over the counter and remarked in a confidential way:

"My dear friend, perhaps you come here with ze idea of doing a little business with ze count, eh?"

And then perceiving that the Englishman hesitated to reply he continued:

"My very dear sir, think not for one little moment, I beg, that I have any intention or desire to pry into your business! Oh, no! I am a man who attends strictly to his own affairs, I assure you, but the reason why I spoke was that I desired to say to you that if you came here with the idea of doing business with Captain Le Noir that you will find him to be a most wonderful man; such a head! such a marvelous capacity for planning and so expert in managing all the details."

"Ah, my dear sir, when it comes to business he is a very Napoleon."

"I have never met the captain but once, and then as he happened to be in a hurry I only had the chance to have a few minutes' conversation with him, so I am not in a position to pass an opinion in regard to his capabilities," Crickley explained.

"My dear sir, I give you my word—I pledge my sacred honor, that you will find the noble captain to be just such a man as I have depicted!" the old Frenchman averred with earnestness.

"If you make any arrangements with him you will find him to be a noble paymaster!" the host continued.

"Why, because he has the genius to plan and the power to execute, so that all who are concerned with him are certain to reap rich gains, therefore if you are wise and desire to make ze-gold you will join this great man in his ventures."

"Yes, I think of doing a little business with him," Crickley remarked.

"He is no stranger to me, you understand. I knew him across the water—in La Belle France," the old Frenchman declared.

"Some of ze schemes which he carried out there were stupendous, and all concerned with him pulled in the golden pieces by the handful."

"Why, then, should he not do as well here with these dull American pigs, who are but as blind bats when compared to Frenchmen?"

"I do not see any reason why he should not make a success of it," Crickley remarked.

"He will do it, noble sir, be assured of that!" the old Frenchman asserted.

"Henri, my dear child, show this esteemed gentleman to the room where the noble captain sits with his friends."

The youth nodded.

"Follow him, good sir, and please to bear in mind what I say. The captain is a magnificent man!"

Crickley bowed his head in assent, and then followed the lad, who led the way to a door in the rear of the saloon.

Through this door the two passed, and found themselves in the entry.

They ascended a flight of stairs, and in the entry above the lad knocked at the door of the rear room.

A deep voice cried out:

"Enter!"

The lad opened the door and ushered the Englishman into the apartment.

"A gentleman to see Captain Le Noir?" he announced, speaking in French.

"Admit him!" responded one of the occupants of the apartment.

"Walk in!" said the lad, in English, to Crickley, who had halted on the threshold.

When the Englishman entered the room, he

found himself in a small, square apartment, plainly furnished.

There were two men in the room, plainly dressed in dark clothes, with soft hats pulled low down on their brows.

They had bushy, black hair, worn quite long, and crispy-curling black beards, and so elaborate were these hairy appendages that when taken in connection with the hat brim only a very small portion of the faces of the men could be seen.

The pair were seated at a round table in the center of the room, upon which were a couple of bottles of wine with some glasses, and as they looked up at the entrance of the Englishman they presented the appearance of a couple of conspirators—socialists, or their fellow agitators, anarchists, who had met with the intent of plotting to overthrow a government.

One of the two was above, the other below the medium size.

"Oho, it is the gentleman I expected!" the taller man cried.

This was Captain Le Noir.

"Help yourself to a chair and a glass of wine," the captain continued.

The lad had retired immediately and closed the door behind him.

"This is my friend, Major Buffarn, one of the right sort and warranted to be true blue!" the captain added.

The major bowed.

"Glad to meet you," he remarked.

Crickley responded to the invitation and took a seat at the table.

The captain filled up the glasses.

"We will drink now to our better acquaintance."

The three emptied the glasses.

"Now for business," the captain remarked.

"When I met you before I was in a great hurry and so had no time to talk, so I merely outlined the scheme to you."

"Yes, I comprehend."

"And you said you were willing to go into it?"

"Oh, yes; I thought there was a good chance to make something handsome out of the matter from the way you described the affair."

"There isn't a doubt that we can secure a rich booty if we play our cards well."

"So it seems to me."

"You secured the place without any trouble?" the captain asked.

"Yes, and I commence my duties to-morrow."

"That is good, there is no use of allowing the grass to grow under one's feet. You are willing then to take orders from me?" the captain questioned.

"Oh, yes, and I will do my best to carry them out."

"It is possible that I may give your orders through another party, so if any one says to you, 'Which do you like best, black or white?' you will understand the party is my agent and can be trusted."

"I will remember."

"That is all to-night. Take some more wine and we will drink success to our scheme!"

The toast was drunk and then Crickley departed.

CHAPTER VI.

A DESPAIRING GIRL.

WE will return now to the veteran detective, the iron-willed, keen-witted detective whom we left in the boat on the river.

The tide was on the ebb and setting strongly out to sea, so by the time the gang got to the end of the dock the boat was so far away that there wasn't a possibility of the keenest sighted ruffian being able to distinguish the little craft.

The oarsman who guided the course of the boat was Joe Phenix's able lieutenant, Tony Western.

To those who have read the Joe Phenix romances this gentleman is no stranger; to our other readers who now for the first time make Tony Western's acquaintance we will say that he was a most excellent assistant to the great crook-hunter, and the two, taken together, made an extremely strong team.

Although the boat was so far away from the pier as to be out of sight, owing to the gloom of the night, yet to the ears of the two in the little craft the sounds of the footsteps of the ruffians as they ran on the dock came distinctly.

Tony Western chuckled as he listened to the sounds, pulling away in a cautious manner at the oars.

"This is about as neat a little game as you ever got up, I opine," he said, in a low, subdued tone.

"Well, I think it is going to work all right," Joe Phenix replied, in the same cautious manner.

"I do not doubt that this Englishman will be able to render valuable assistance, and through his aid I may be able to capture this gang, which is evidently composed of first-class men; and I have an impression, too, that this particular coterie of rascals have not been operating long in New York, by which I infer that it is composed of over-the-sea crooks."

"Foreigners, eh?"

"Yes, and they seem to work more cautiously than any gang I ever encountered."

"Well, I think that as a rule the first-class foreign crooks are even more skillful than our American rascals," Tony Western observed.

"They are certainly more cautious in working their games than our native-born scoundrels," Joe Phenix replied.

"Acting on the idea that this particular gang was composed of foreign crooks, I have been making some investigations in the French, Italian and German quarters, going to the places frequented by adventurers of those nationalities, but although I did not succeed in getting on the track, yet I learned enough to satisfy me that there was a track to get on."

"Well, you gained some information, anyway," Tony Western remarked.

"And when the fact came to my knowledge that some of these crooks were so anxious to compass my death by means of this dull-headed Englishman, I immediately conjectured that the men probably were up to some game, and they were anxious to get me out of the way for fear I would be skillful enough to spoil the scheme."

"It certainly looks like it."

"If it is so, the crooks can now rejoice, for I have apparently joined the majority over the dark river, and they are free to go ahead with their schemes."

"It was a capital device, it seems to me, and I should not be surprised if you managed to snare your birds."

"I must be careful to keep in the background so that the fellows will not have a suspicion that I have escaped this trap."

"Oh, yes, that will be necessary."

By this time the boat had arrived at the point from whence Tony Western had started and he pulled into the float, where the old Irishman who had charge of the boats was waiting for them.

The pair landed and proceeded to the street.

"There is not much danger of anybody recognizing me up in this quarter," Phenix remarked as they proceeded southward, going along the street parallel with the river.

"No, not much, for the streets are about deserted," Tony Western responded.

"I will take first cross-town car line and so get to my house, and there assume a disguise in which I think I can bid defiance to discovery."

"You must remain at the office as usual, and it will be your role to be a little puzzled by my absence; still, as I am in the habit of going away and remaining for a week or two at a time, it does not appear as suspicious as it would were I an ordinary business man."

"That is very true."

At this moment the pair were about a hundred feet from the corner of the cross-street and so were able to clearly distinguish the figure of a slight female, dressed in dark clothes who hurried across the street and proceeded out on the pier.

This was another long, lonely dock, without a single craft moored in the neighborhood.

The figure was evidently that of a young woman and she hurried on with hasty steps as though she feared pursuit; but as she looked neither to the right nor left she did not notice the two coming along the river street.

But the detectives were men whose eyes had been trained to observation, and they took note not only of the woman, but of the peculiar way in which she was hurrying along.

"Hello! that looks suspicious!" Joe Phenix exclaimed.

"She acts as if she was pursued," Tony Western declared.

The two quickened their steps, but when they reached the corner they saw that there was not a soul in sight.

To both of them the same idea immediately occurred.

"It looks as if she was bent on suicide!"

"Yes, decidedly so."

"We must stop her!"

And the two hurried up the dock after the girl.

They hastened onward with noiseless steps, and by the time the woman had reached the end of the pier they were right behind her.

She halted, wrung her hands wildly for a moment, and then, having no idea that anybody was in the neighborhood, cried aloud:

"Oh, isn't this dreadful! I am so young to die, and I have always tried to be a good girl, too, and now to think that this black cloud of shame should come upon me, so that I must find a grave beneath the dark waters in order to hide myself from the world—the bright, beautiful world that I love so well!" she burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

"Be ready to grab her if she attempts to spring overboard when I speak to her," the veteran whispered to his assistant.

Tony Western nodded.

"I beg pardon, miss," Phenix said.

The girl started like a guilty, hunted thing.

"Oh, heavens! what do you want with me?" she cried in wild alarm.

"We want to do you a service if we can," Joe Phenix replied, in his gentlest tones.

"A service?" the girl echoed.

She had turned and was now facing the detectives.

The moon came out just at this moment, so the two got a good view of the woman's face.

As they had surmised from her slender figure, she was but a slip of a girl, eighteen or nineteen, probably, with an honest, round, red and white face.

She was evidently not of gentle birth, but of the class from whence the maid-servants of the metropolis are recruited; but she was no vulgar, common girl; on the contrary, she had a gentle, attractive face, and was evidently a modest, unassuming girl.

"Yes, you seem to be in trouble, and although we are strangers, yet when one is in affliction, a service may be accepted even from those with whom we are not acquainted."

"Oh, yes, sir, I suppose that is true, but I am afraid there isn't anybody who can help me," the girl replied, with an air of utter despair.

"Oh, no, my girl, I cannot believe that it is as bad as that," Joe Phenix responded in a cheerful way.

"I am afraid that you are taking altogether too gloomy a view of it," he continued.

"That is a fault that a great many of us have, and we must strive all we can to fight against yielding to depression."

"But I am so terribly situated!" the girl declared, her tears again flowing freely.

"Yes, I don't doubt that you think so, but matters may not be so bad as you think," Phenix argued; "we sometimes make a mistake in regard to such matters."

"Oh, I don't think I have made any mistake," she replied.

"In a case of this kind the party most deeply interested is the worst possible judge," the veteran detective urged. "Man and woman are sometimes afflicted with almost total blindness when they come to examine their own affairs, and it requires a stranger who knows absolutely nothing about the matter to discover the truth."

"Well, it may be so," the girl observed doubtfully.

"I am quite certain that it is the truth, so compose yourself and tell me your story."

"Do not be afraid to trust me for I assure you that you need not hesitate to do so."

The girl gazed searchingly in the face of the man-hunter.

Men upon whose wrists this human bloodhound had snapped the iron bracelets, criminals whom he had hunted to their doom, always thought that the features of the detective wore an expression as stern as that which shines on the face of an avenging angel, but this simple, honest-hearted country girl saw only tenderness and consideration written on Joe Phenix's countenance.

"Perhaps you are right," she said, slowly taking out her handkerchief and wiping away her tears as she spoke.

"There is something in your voice and face which makes me feel sure I can trust you and so I will tell you my story."

"You will not have cause to regret your confidence, I am sure," the detective rejoined.

"My name is Bessy Murray and I am a waiting-maid in the family of Mr. Mullett who resides in the Alhambra Flats," the girl explained.

The detective was surprised. Here was Mullett appearing again on the scene!

"Is this the Mullett who is interested in Montana mines?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"I have heard of the gentleman."

"I have only been in the house a week but during that time I have had the misfortune to incur the displeasure of the French maid of Mrs. Mullett."

"The French woman doesn't like you, eh?" the veteran questioned.

"No, sir."

"And what is the reason for the dislike?"

"Well, really there isn't any reason," the girl replied in an innocent way.

"What is the name of this girl?"

"Well, she isn't exactly a girl."

"A woman?"

"Yes, sir."

"How old?"

"Thirty-five I think, although she says that she is only twenty-four, but I don't believe she will ever see thirty-five again, for I know she is a good deal older than I am, and I am twenty-two."

"What is her name?"

"Celestine Kiefferberg."

"From the name I should imagine that she is more German than French," Phenix observed.

"She is from Alsace I believe."

"Ah, yes, I comprehend; a French German."

"I am satisfied that the woman took a dislike to me right at the beginning," the girl explained.

"But when I said there wasn't any reason, perhaps I did not speak quite correctly for although there really isn't any good reason why she should dislike me, yet I have an idea that she doesn't like it because Miss Pauline, the young lady of the house, Mr. Mullett's daughter, appears to have taken a fancy to me."

"And the French woman is jealous, eh?"

"Yes, sir, I think so."

"It is very likely."

"Celestine at present acts as maid to both

mother and daughter, but on several occasions Miss Pauline has called upon me to assist her."

"And the French woman is probably afraid you will supplant her?"

"Perhaps so, but that is all nonsense, for I do not pretend to be a lady's maid, not having had any experience, while she has served all sort of great ladies in France and England, and so knows her duties thoroughly."

"Some women don't stop to calculate in regard to such matters."

"I knew from the way she looked at me that I had incurred her dislike, but I made up my mind to go on quietly about my business, and not to pay any attention to her."

"Ah, yes, that is always the best way," Joe Phenix remarked.

"And we never had any trouble until tonight," the girl explained.

"My duties being all done I was sitting in my room, reading, when Celestine came in abruptly without knocking."

"Her room is right next to mine. I looked up in surprise, for she startled me by coming in without warning, and then she said, 'There has been a valuable diamond ring taken from Miss Pauline's room. Do you know anything about it?'"

"Rather a startling announcement!" the veteran detective commented. "And, I presume, you replied that you didn't?"

"Yes, sir, and then she said, 'You must not think to get out of it by lying, for I know that you took it!' 'Oh, I didn't!' I cried."

"Then she rushed to my trunk, which was unlocked, threw up the lid, fumbled a moment in my clothes, and then held up the ring. 'Here it is!' she cried. 'If you are in this house in the morning off you go to jail!' and then hastened away."

"I was thunderstruck; then I dressed myself and ran out into the street; rather than be arrested for a thief I would die!"

"And so you wanted to commit suicide?"

"Yes, sir."

"Nonsense! It is a scheme of the French woman to drive you out of the house. I am a detective and am up to all tricks of the kind."

"Go back to your place, and defy the woman. In the morning an old friend of yours will call on you, Uncle Toby Johnson; that will be myself in disguise, and I will see you through all right, but you must put on a bold front!"

The words of the man-hunter brought new courage to the girl.

"I will do it!" she cried.

"Come on then; I will see you safely home."

CHAPTER VII.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon on the day after the one in which occurred the events related in our last chapter.

Into Madison Square Park, one of the little bits of greenery which relieve the somber bricks and stones of the great metropolis, came a good-looking, well-dressed man of twenty-five or thereabouts.

He was a dark-eyed, dark-haired fellow, with regular features, clearly cut and expressive, and the peculiar air which plainly indicated that he came of good stock and had been well brought up and carefully educated.

He was called Jeremiah Shelstone and was a civil engineer by profession.

Proceeding along at a good pace, with the light, springy step common to youth and perfect health, he was getting over the ground at a good rate, when in turning a corner in the path—he was going toward Madison avenue—he came face to face with a pretty, round-faced, blue-eyed blonde-haired girl.

There was a clump of bushes at the bend of the path which prevented the two from seeing each other until they came face to face.

An exclamation of surprise came from the lips of both as they encountered each other; owing to the abrupt bend they were compelled to halt to prevent a collision.

"Why, Pauline!" cried the young man, evidently very much surprised.

"Oh, Jerry!" came from the red lips of the girl, equally amazed.

Then the gentleman suddenly seemed to remember himself, and drawing his form up he raised his hat in a formal manner.

"I really beg pardon for addressing you in so familiar a manner," he said. "But I was completely taken by surprise upon meeting you so unexpectedly, and so involuntarily I called you by the old familiar name, but I presume I ought to have said Miss Mullett."

"You must suit yourself in regard to that," the girl replied, her face getting a trifle red and her lips quivering.

"Well, I suppose that you would prefer I would not be so familiar with you," the young man remarked, slowly, and from the way in which he spoke it was evident that the subject was an unpleasant one.

"I don't see why you should come to any such conclusion!" the girl exclaimed, her face getting redder and a sparkle of temper in her eyes.

"But it would only be natural for me to sup-

pose that you did not care to have our acquaintance continued after the way in which you treated me."

"After the way in which I treated you?" young Shelstone exclaimed in amazement.

"Yes, that is what I said!" the girl retorted, fire sparkling in her bright blue eyes.

"If I exhibited the proper spirit which I ought to display I would pass you by without noticing you at all," she continued in an extremely petulant way.

"I do not understand this at all, for according to the way the matter appears to me I am the one who ought to complain."

"Oh, how can you say that?" the girl exclaimed, reproachfully.

"There seems to be a misunderstanding here," Shelstone remarked.

"There is a bench in a nice retired spot, so suppose we sit down and have an explanation."

"Very well, I don't mind," the girl replied.

"Although really I am treating you a great deal better than you deserve to talk to you at all."

"Oh, no!" the young man exclaimed immediately. "You are making a dreadful mistake in saying that, as I feel sure I can soon show you if you will only do me the favor to listen to me."

"And it is only right that you should grant me a hearing, you know," he continued. "If I was the greatest rascal in the world I would be entitled to a fair trial. It is altogether wrong to condemn a man unheard."

"Yes, that is certainly the truth," she admitted, as they proceeded to the bench upon which they seated themselves.

"Now then, let us begin at our first meeting," Shelstone said.

"You resided in Spanish Bar, a mining camp in the wilds of Montana, where your papa kept a general store which included the post-office of the town."

"Yes, and ma kept some boarders to help pa along for the store didn't pay very well," the girl remarked.

"I came to Spanish Bar in the interest of the Montana Northern Railway Line," the young man observed.

"There was trouble about the right of way in the neighborhood of Spanish Bar, and the company sent me out there to arrange the matter."

"And you came to board at our house," the girl remarked.

"Where I remained for six weeks—the most delightful six weeks of my existence!" Shelstone exclaimed, enthusiastically.

The girl blushed, cast a shy look at the glowing face of the young and then let her gaze rest upon the ground.

"To state the case exactly as it is, I fell over head and ears in love with you at the first glance," the young man continued.

"And the more I became acquainted with you the greater became my admiration, for I considered you to be the very perfection of a woman."

"Oh, Jerry, you really mustn't talk so for you make me blush!" the girl exclaimed. And this was the truth for her face was covered with a soft blush, but there was a happy look in her eyes which plainly showed that the sweet words were welcome to her ears.

"It is the truth!" the young man urged.

"And in order to arrive at a proper understanding in regard to the matter the truth ought to be spoken, eh?"

"Yes, I suppose so," the girl replied in a shy way.

"Of course I could not help letting you see that I admired you greatly, and I was foolish enough to believe that you liked me."

"Oh, yes, I did!" the girl exclaimed in an honest way. "I will not attempt to conceal the fact for I do not think it would be right."

"I was frank, too, with you in regard to the matter, for while I did not hesitate to tell you that I thought you were one of the nicest girls I have ever met, yet I was honest enough to say that I was so situated I could not ask you to be my wife, for I did not consider it right to bind you to a long engagement, for although my friends were kind enough to believe that I had the making of a fine lawyer in me, yet, as I had not made a name for myself, my income was small and precarious."

"Oh, yes; you acted in the most noble manner!" the girl exclaimed, in a way which showed that the words came straight from her heart.

"No, no; that is altogether too strong an expression," the young fellow declared.

"I only acted as any honest man ought to have acted."

"Then, when the Spanish Bar business was settled, I was summoned to the East—to New York—with the intimation that it was possible a place might be made for me in the home office of the company."

"Oh, yes; I remember only too well," the girl remarked with a sigh.

"Before we parted we came to an understanding," Shelstone observed.

"After I arrived in New York we were to correspond, and it was the agreement that as soon as I found myself in a position to support a wife we were to be married."

"Yes, that is correct."

"As soon as I got to New York I wrote to you, saying that everything seemed favorable."

"Yes, I received the letter and answered it immediately."

"You did?" cried the young man, amazed.

"Yes."

"I never got it."

"Is it possible?"

"It is, and after I waited for a week or so I wrote again, thinking that it was possible that either my letter to you had been lost in the mail or yours to me."

"Yes, that thought occurred to me when I did not get any answer to my letter, and so I wrote twice."

"Wrote twice to me?"

"Yes; so you can judge how interested I was, to write three letters when I did not get a reply."

"And I wrote five before I gave up in despair!"

"Then I came to the natural conclusion that you had changed your mind in regard to me and did not desire to correspond."

"Yes, that was exactly what I thought," the girl observed. "And although I felt dreadfully wounded, I was too proud to allow any one to know anything about the matter."

"After I had written the fifth letter the company wanted some one to go to England to attend to an important business matter in London, and I was selected, with the intimation that if I succeeded in my mission I would be given a good position in the firm which attends to all the company's legal business."

"Oh, wasn't that nice!" the girl exclaimed, in delight.

"I went with a heavy heart, I can tell you, on account of not hearing from you; but after I got in London I did my best to win success, for I made up my mind that just as soon as I could afford the time and the money I would make a trip to Spanish Bar just for the satisfaction of hearing from your own lips why it was that you did not answer my letters."

"Oh, it is really too dreadful altogether!" the girl declared.

"I had to stop in London for over six months before I settled matters, but at last I had the pleasure of arranging everything to the complete satisfaction of the railroad people, and when I returned home they gave me the promised position, so now I am so situated as to be able to afford to get married, and next week I was going to start for Spanish Bar to see if I could clear up the mystery," the young man declared.

"I can do it now, I think, for a light breaks in upon me," the girl observed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MINING KING.

"That is good, and I shall be very glad indeed to find out about the matter."

"It is Pop!"

Your father?

"Yes, he is the man who intercepted our letters!" the girl declared.

"Is it possible?"

"Oh, yes, it is the old story, you know," the girl remarked with a sad smile. "I have read of such tricks in novels a dozen times, but I never thought that anything of the kind would ever happen to me."

"Your father was the postmaster," Shelstone observed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, and he always made a point of attending to the mails himself, so it was the easiest thing in the world for him to intercept the letters."

"Ah, yes, I see; of course it was no trouble for him to perform a trick of that kind," the young man assented.

"But, in the name of all that is wonderful, why did he want to do anything of the kind?"

"From the kind way in which he always treated me I was under the impression that he had a particularly good opinion of me and I did not anticipate that he would make any objections to our union."

"Oh, he was all right while you were at Spanish Bar, but that was nearly a year ago, mind."

"Yes, I understand, and the lapse of time sometimes makes a deal of difference in a man's opinions."

"Great changes have taken place in my father's circumstances since the time when you boarded with us," the girl explained.

"Yes, I am aware that the old gentleman was not making a fortune very rapidly at the time for he used to sit on a cracker-barrel in his store and grumble at his ill-luck by the hour."

"Oh, yes, that is true, pa did not have any genius for store-keeping, and if it had not been for ma's boarders we would have had a hard time to get along."

"But if I remember rightly the old gentleman was never willing to admit that your mother's boarders assisted him at all," Shelstone remarked. "For while I was at your house I believe that he told me a dozen times at least that it was against his will that the boarders were kept."

The girl laughed.

"Ah, yes, that was just like pop—or pa, as I have to call him now."

"Pop was all right for Spanish Bar but it will not do at all for New York," she explained.

"Pa always believed in talking big, and although he could not help grumbling at the poor business which the store did, yet he always pretended that he did not care for the boarders—just kept them, you know, for the sake of their society, not because he made any money out of them."

"Ah, yes, that is the old story."

"But as I told you great changes have taken place in my father's circumstances during the past year."

"I can see that you are dressed in the height of style," the young man remarked with an admiring glance at the girl's pretty costume.

"And although I do not pretend to be a judge of ladies' apparel, yet I should imagine that this 'harness' of yours, to use the Western term, cost a good bit of money, and then your jewelry too is both elaborate and costly I should judge."

"Yes, pa insists upon both ma and myself dressing as though he was a millionaire, for his argument is that no one in New York is thought anything of unless they put on lots of style."

Shelstone laughed.

"Well, I don't know but what there is a good deal of truth in that, but the question arises is the game worth the candle, to use the old saying."

"There are a great many people in New York—people of the old families, and who really amount to something, who don't think it is, for they do not put on any style and appear to enjoy their life as well as the upstarts—the newly rich who try to dazzle the eyes of the beholders with their gaudy display."

"Yes, I do not doubt it, and if ma and I had our way we wouldn't be here in New York trying to cut a dash, but as pop—I mean pa—has his heart so set on it, neither ma nor I care to dispute with him about the matter."

"Yes, I understand; it is natural for you to think that way about it," Shelstone remarked.

"But what is this change that has taken place in your father's circumstances?"

"He has become a rich man."

"That is good for him, and good for yourself and mother also."

"Yes, that is true."

"How did he happen to acquire wealth?" the young man asked.

"He got an interest in some mines which were not thought to be valuable when he got into the speculation, and then some valuable discoveries were made, and all the people interested in the properties suddenly woke up one morning and found that they were all right."

"A very agreeable state of affairs, I must say," the young man observed with a smile.

"Oh, yes; but the sudden rise to fortune has completely turned pa's head, and really he has become so puffed up that none of his old acquaintances can come near him."

"I do not like a trait of that kind in a man," Shelstone observed in a serious way.

"Why should the possession of a little money make such a difference in a man?" he continued.

"I may not know myself as well as I think I do, but it is my opinion that if I were to wake up to-morrow and find myself worth ten or twenty millions, it would not make the slightest change in me."

"No, I do not honestly believe it would."

"Thank you. I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion," the young lawyer responded, with a grateful bow.

The girl acknowledged the salutation with a smile.

"I am only telling you just what I think about the matter," she observed.

"And since your father's sudden rise to fortune he has got the idea in his head that he saw a better husband for you than I would make?" Shelstone questioned.

"Yes, I suppose so, but he has acted in such a cunning way about the matter that I never suspected he had anything to do with the missing letters."

"He never came out openly then and said that you ought to make a better match than to wed with a young lawyer like myself?" Shelstone asked.

"No, he never said anything about you, excepting that when I happened to say one day that I thought it very strange I did not hear from you, he made the remark that young men were inclined to be fickle-minded, and he presumed that you had met some girl whom you preferred to me."

"And, under the circumstances, it was not strange for you to believe the statement to be correct," the young man remarked.

"Well, I really did not know what to think," the girl replied. "I had the most unbounded faith in you, and when I was disappointed about getting letters I came to the conclusion that you must be sick, and so incapable of writing, but when I suggested this to pa, after waiting for some three weeks without hearing from you, he replied that you were all right, for he had met a man direct from New York who had met you and he said that you were getting along very well indeed."

"Well, I do not want to say anything de-

rogatory to your father, Pauline, yet I must remark that I think this about as mean a trick as I ever heard of in all my experience!" Shelstone declared.

"Yes, I agree with you, it is the truth," the girl responded in the frankest manner.

"I will not attempt to defend my father's action, for it cannot be defended."

"Of course, I understand the argument he used to justify his actions," she continued, her lips curling in contempt.

"He was doing it all for my good. As long as he was a poor man it was all right for me to think of marrying you, but when he became rich then he considered it necessary that I should have a wealthy husband."

"Yes, no doubt that was the view he took of the matter, and it is not strange that he should take a notion of that kind into his head, for a good many people are so weak in the upper story that they cannot stand good fortune."

"Pa is certainly one of that kind," the girl admitted. "For his sudden rise to wealth has undoubtedly turned his head. If he had remained a poor man I don't believe he would have made the slightest objection to your marrying me."

"Of course I had no suspicion that there would be any objection on his part, and so I did not attempt to conceal the fact that we had arranged to correspond; I opened your letter too right in his presence, and told him that it was from you."

"That was the right course to pursue," the young man remarked. "There was no reason why the matter should be kept secret."

"Certainly not," the girl coincided. "I received your letter by the noon mail, and a couple of hours later the intelligence arrived that a great strike had been made in the mines in which pa was interested, and about everybody in the town came rushing in to congratulate pa upon his good luck."

"His head was turned immediately, I suppose, and when I gave him my letter to you to put in the mail-bag that night—you see I did not waste any time in answering," she added, with a charming blush—"the thought probably occurred to him that now he was a rich man it would not do for his daughter to correspond with a gentleman like yourself, and so he took the letter."

"Yes, you are right I think. This is the explanation of the riddle," Shelstone observed.

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of an elderly couple.

CHAPTER IX.

"THE MINING KING."

THE gentleman was a short, fat man with a red face and carrot hair, presenting anything but an imposing presence, although he was dressed in the most elaborate manner and strutted along with an air that seemed to suggest that he thought he was one of the great men of the city.

The lady, who was also dressed in the height of fashion—in fact, over-dressed, to speak correctly—was taller than the gentleman, and possessed a sweet, motherly expression which was decidedly attractive.

There was a striking resemblance between the girl on the bench and the elderly lady, and any person of judgment would have suspected at the first glance that they were mother and daughter.

"Oh, here is pa and ma!" the girl exclaimed in an undertone as the two made their appearance.

And then she laughed, while a slight blush crimsoned her cheeks.

"We are fairly caught," she continued. "But I don't care!"

"Well, I am certain that I do not if you don't," the young lawyer observed.

"We haven't done anything to be ashamed of and the quicker your papa comprehends that we have come to an understanding the better."

"Oh, yes," the girl responded.

By this time the two were so near as to put an end to the conversation.

If Jonathan Mullett, late of Spanish Bar, and now of New York, was displeased to find his daughter in conversation with the young lawyer, there were no signs of such a feeling in his face.

On the contrary he grinned in the most affable manner as he came up, and Mrs. Mullett's face too wore a friendly expression.

"Really this is an unexpected pleasure!" the old gentleman declared as he shook hands with Shelstone.

"You remember our friend here, of course, Caroline?" he continued.

"Oh, yes, and I am delighted to see you again," Mrs. Mullett declared in her good-natured way, and it was plain from the way she spoke that she meant what she said.

"Mr. Shelstone and I happened to meet just by accident, and we sat down to talk over old times," Pauline explained.

"Ah, yes, yes, quite natural, of course, and I am glad to have the pleasure of meeting the gentleman," and Mr. Mullett rubbed his hands

softly together and beamed upon the young man.

"You are a lawyer if I remember rightly, Mr. Shelstone," the old gentleman continued.

"Yes, sir, I am," Shelstone replied.

"I am very glad that I met you, then, for I need a little legal advice."

"If I can be of service to you, I shall be glad of the opportunity," the young man remarked, with extreme politeness.

But he was not at all deceived by the manner of the other.

He felt sure that this extreme friendliness was assumed.

It was not natural for the old gentleman to act in this way, and Shelstone suspected that he had some deep purpose in view.

"Pauline, my dear, you can accompany your mother," Mr. Mullett continued, "while Mr. Shelstone and I have a little quiet chat."

Both the young man and the girl had risen at the approach of the elderly couple.

"Yes, papa; good-by, Mr. Shelstone, I trust I will soon have the pleasure of seeing you again."

"We have apartments in the Alhambra, on upper Broadway, and I will be pleased to have you call at any time," the girl continued.

"Yes, do call; you will find us at home every Thursday, certainly!" the mother declared in the most candid manner.

"Thank you, I shall be pleased to accept the invitation," the young lawyer replied, and as he spoke—lifting his hat to the departing ladies—he cast a glance out of the corner of his eye at the head of the Mullett family, and, as he had anticipated, the old gentleman did not look pleased.

But when he turned toward Mr. Mullett, that gentleman immediately began to grin again in the most friendly manner.

"Take a seat, Mr. Shelstone," the old gentleman remarked, waving his fat hand to the bench in a lordly way.

The young lawyer bowed in response to the invitation, and the two seated themselves upon the bench.

"Let me see, it is some time since we met," the old gentleman remarked in a reflective way.

"Yes, it is."

"Nearly a year."

"About a year."

"In a year a great many changes occur," Mr. Mullett said with a grave shake of the head.

"You are right."

"I presume that you have perceived that I am not exactly the same man that I was when you were a guest at my house in Spanish Bar," the old gentleman observed with an admiring glance at his costly suit of clothes.

"Oh, yes, I can readily perceive that," Shelstone replied.

"I presume that my daughter has explained to you that I am much differently situated from what I was when I resided in Montana?" the old gentleman asked.

"Yes, she told me that you had acquired considerable money from some fortunate investments in Montana mines."

"That was why I went West, you understand, Mr. Shelstone. I had perfect confidence in my own judgment, and I felt sure that after I got on the ground I could succeed in locating some valuable claims, and I did it too, Mr. Shelstone; fortune smiled upon my efforts and now I have the name of being one of the great mining kings of the West."

And as he made the announcement the little, fat, old gentleman assumed such an extremely pompous air that it was as much as the young man could do to refrain from laughing in his face.

But with an effort he preserved his gravity and remarked:

"You have reason to congratulate yourself, I think."

"Yes, there is no doubt that I have displayed great business sagacity, and I can assure you, Mr. Shelstone, that a great many of the smartest men in the mining business—men who are away up at the top of the heap, as the saying is—are glad to ask my advice at times, because they are aware that I am a practical man, possessed of vast experience."

The young man nodded assent.

Although he desired to stand well with the old gentleman, yet as he felt satisfied there was very little truth in his assertions in regard to his business ability, he did not feel like complimenting him about the matter.

"Yes, sir, fortune has smiled upon me in the most signal manner," the old gentleman continued, in his most pompous way.

"Of course I suppose you understand that my keeping the little store and allowing my wife to take boarders was only a part of a cunning scheme of mine," he explained.

"I was after information—I wished to become familiar with the ground, and I am proud to say that I succeeded to my heart's content!"

And the little fat man looked around him with the air of a Monte Cristo when he cries, "The world is mine!"

Again the young lawyer bowed. He knew that the old gentleman was telling a terrible whopper, and he rather felt annoyed to think

that Mullett considered him verdant enough to swallow the yarn.

"I was lying in ambush, as it were, waiting for a favorable opportunity to spring out and secure my prey," the old gentleman continued.

"I was possessed of a tolerable amount of money, you understand, Mr. Shelstone, but I did not have enough to keep up the dignity of my family as I desired."

"You are not aware, of course, Mr. Shelstone, that I come of a noble race!" and as he made the announcement the little man threw his head back and put on an air of dignity which was ludicrous in the extreme.

Shelstone repressed the strong desire he had to laugh, and affecting to be much interested, he said:

"Is it possible, Mr. Mullett?"

"Yes, sir, it is," the old gentleman answered with deep solemnity.

"I am the descendant of an ancient French race—a family which has been noble for a thousand years."

"Is it possible?" the young lawyer again exclaimed, disposed to humor the old man.

"Oh, yes. Since I have made my fortune, and had time to employ experts to examine into the matter, I have succeeded in tracing my family tree in the most complete manner," he explained.

"The name is not really Mullett, but M-u-l-l-e-t-t-e," and he spelled the name.

"The correct pronunciation is Mullay, with the accent, you understand, on the *lay*."

"Ah, yes, I comprehend," Shelstone remarked, looking at the old man as he spoke, with an inquiring air, for the thought was in his mind, "did the old gentleman really believe this to be the truth?"

"I have caused investigations to be made in France, and from the discoveries that my agents have made, I am satisfied that there is a large estate and a noble title waiting for me to come and claim them."

"You amaze me!" Shelstone declared. And this was the truth, for he was astonished to find the old gentleman possessed of an idea of this kind.

"As soon as I can arrange my affairs here to my satisfaction I shall go to France to claim my ancestral rights!" Mr. Mullett exclaimed, with a great deal of dignity.

CHAPTER X.

PLAIN WORDS.

THE young lawyer did not know exactly what to say, for the idea seemed utterly ridiculous to him.

"Yes, sir, I shall soon sail for France, accompanied by my family, of course," the old gentleman explained.

"And then after I have succeeded in securing my family estates I do not think I am out of the way in supposing that my daughter will make a brilliant marriage. With my noble title and my colossal fortune I do not think I am setting my ideas too high when I declare that I will not be satisfied with anything less than a prince of the blood royal!" he asserted more pompously than ever.

The murder was out now.

Shelstone suspected from the beginning that the old gentleman had some deep purpose in view when he said he wished to converse with him.

The revelation that the girl had made about the missing letters had opened the young lawyer's eyes as to old Mullett's character.

"How does your daughter feel in regard to this matter?" Shelstone asked, quietly.

"Eh—I—hum! Oh, well, she will not fail to perceive the advantages of such a union," Mullett replied, a little confused.

"Yes, but suppose she has already formed an attachment for a gentleman on this side of the water?"

"Oh, I do not believe such a thing can be possible!" the father declared, evidently uneasy.

"Mr. Mullett, I may as well be honest with you, for it is not my habit to beat about the bush," the young lawyer remarked in his straight-forward way.

"Your daughter and myself came to an understanding when we met about a year ago in Montana!"

"You astonish me!" the old gentleman declared, getting very red in the face.

"It is the truth; we did not become engaged because at the time I was not in a position to fix any date for our marriage and I did not wish to bind her to what might prove to be a long engagement."

"Well, that was quite proper," the old gentleman remarked.

"We arranged to correspond, but some vile rascal managed to intercept our letters with a design, of course, of making trouble between us, and the dirty scoundrel succeeded, but this chance meeting to-day made everything all right, and the sneaking villain who intercepted our letters only had his labor for his pains."

The old gentleman got very red in the face during this speech, and betrayed decided traces of uneasiness.

"If I could only find out who the scoundrel was that did this piece of rascality I would make it particularly hot for him—in fact, it would give me a deal of pleasure to put him through such a course of sprouts that he would never dare to try to work another game of the kind as long as he lives you may be sure!" Shelstone declared.

"Very mysterious—very much so, upon my word!" the old gentleman gasped in a particularly unhappy state of mind.

"But everything is all right now," the young lawyer asserted. "Your daughter and I understand each other, and as I am in a position now to afford to get married I trust I shall be able to get your consent to our union."

Old Mullett shook his head and looked deeply grieved.

"Really, I am so astonished about this matter that I do not know what to say," he averred.

"I imagined that you perceived we were very fond of each other when we were in Montana."

"Ah, yes, I did have an idea of the kind then, but as so much time has elapsed since you saw each other I thought the affair was all over," the old gentleman observed, slowly.

"Oh, no; on the contrary, we think more of each other than we ever did."

"I am amazed," Mullett declared, slowly, and with an air of deep disgust.

"The time which has elapsed since we parted has only served to strengthen the love which we had for each other," the young lawyer explained.

"And I am very glad that you have afforded me an opportunity to show you just how matters stand."

"Ah, yes," the old gentleman remarked, in an absent way.

"I very much prefer to have everything open and above-board in a case of this kind."

"Yes, I suppose so," and the remark was uttered in a melancholy manner.

"I do not like to either beat about the bush or to do anything in a secret or underhand way."

"Yes, yes, I understand," the old gentleman observed, evidently at a loss for words.

"And I am glad of a chance to explain matters, so you will understand just how I am situated," Shelstone continued.

"If you remember, I came to Montana—to your town of Spanish Bar—to attend to the business of a certain railway company, and I had the good luck to arrange the matter so as to give perfect satisfaction to my principals, therefore, when I returned to New York they intrusted me with a commission to London."

"Ah, yes, you were fortunate," the old gentleman observed, absently, and it was evident that he was deep in thought, and paying but little attention to the young lawyer's words.

"Again I was lucky enough to make a success of the business, and upon my return to the city I was given an important position in the home office here."

"Very glad to hear it, indeed," Mullett remarked, in a mechanical sort of way.

"My salary at present is forty dollars a week, and as I stand in the direct line of promotion, it is likely that next year I will get fifty."

"A very good prospect, indeed," the old gentleman observed, but it was plain from the way in which he spoke that he took no interest in the matter.

"And of course as time passes I stand a chance to advance steadily, for after a man becomes familiar with the business of a great corporation he is worth a great deal more to the company than a stranger would be."

"Oh, yes, I can understand that."

"I am a prudent, careful young man, with no expensive habits, and have already managed to put by over a thousand dollars in the bank as a provision against the proverbial rainy day."

"A thousand dollars?" the old gentleman questioned in an absent way.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I should think that you have done very nicely indeed," but despite the assuring words, old Mullett shook his head in a doleful way.

"I have taken the trouble to enter into this explanation so you will understand just how I am situated," Shelstone remarked.

"Ah, yes, I see," Mullett observed, in a helpless manner.

"I think that it is proper that you should comprehend that I am able to support a wife in a comfortable style, so you can give your daughter to me without any misgivings in regard to the matter."

"My dear Mr. Shelstone, I trust you will pardon me for saying that the sum which you mention as being your yearly salary will not begin to support my daughter in the luxury to which she has now been accustomed," the old gentleman remarked, having evidently plucked up courage to say something disagreeable.

"Of course I am not a millionaire, or even a hundred thousand dollar chap," the young lawyer remarked, with perfect good nature.

"And I do not pretend to say that I can set up an elaborate establishment in the beginning of my wedded life, but I am so situated that I

can start in good shape, and I am sure I can take good care of any man's daughter."

"I do not doubt, Mr. Shelstone, that you mean to do what is right," the old gentleman observed in his smooth, oily way.

"But the trouble is that you do not look at the matter from my stand-point," Mullett argued.

"Now, as I explained to you I am one of the mining kings of the country," he continued, swelling out in his pompous way again.

"My income is over a hundred thousand dollars a year—that is, you comprehend, my dear sir, I get as much in a week as you do in a year, and really it does not seem to be the fair thing for you to take a girl from a truly magnificent home to what must be a comparatively poor one."

"Don't you think the lady's wishes ought to be consulted in the matter?" Shelstone asked, quietly.

"Ah, yes, you know, but girls sometimes take queer notions into their heads about a matter of this kind," the old gentleman remarked.

"And I really think it is my duty as her father not to allow her to make any mistake."

"This is the old story, of course: your daughter and I think one way and you another; but though I hate to advise a child to go against the will of her parent, yet sometimes it is only right that the child should do so," the young man remarked in a calm, judicial way.

"Pauline is of age, and in my opinion amply capable of judging what course is best for her, and though I hate to have to act contrary to your wishes, yet, under the circumstances, I am obliged to do so."

"Well, well, we will not quarrel!" Mullett declared hastily, rising as he spoke.

"I will speak to my daughter, and we will see if we cannot make some arrangement. Good morning!" And then the old gentleman strutted off.

As he marched away an odd-looking man, well but carelessly dressed, wearing the broad-brimmed slouch-hat of the Westerner, came from behind a clump of bushes, around which the path turned.

CHAPTER XI. THE LIVE YANKEE.

THE new-comer had a long thin face, with high cheek bones, and a big nose, wore a scraggy, peaked chin beard, and to sum him all up he was a good representative of the typical Uncle Sam whom the artists delight to draw.

The stranger came on, with a broad grin on his face, and as the young lawyer surveyed him he had the impression that he had seen him somewhere before.

From the fact, too, that the man made his appearance so abruptly from behind the bushes, in the near neighborhood of the bench, Shelstone came to the conclusion that he must have overheard some of the conversation between himself and the old gentleman.

"How are ye?" quoth the stranger in a strong nasal tone as he came up.

"I am pretty well, thank you; how are you?" Shelstone returned.

"I reckon you don't remember me," with another prodigious grin, as he took the seat on the bench which Mullett had vacated.

"Well, your face is certainly familiar to me but I am not able to recollect where I met you just now."

"It was in that fat galoot's ranch in Spanish Bar," the stranger announced, nodding in the direction that Mullett had taken.

"Yes, I had an idea it was out West somewhere, but my memory was a little hazy in regard to the exact place."

"I only saw you once so it wa'n't any wonder that you couldn't place me," the stranger observed. "It was on the night when you arrived in the camp."

"Yes, I recollect the circumstance now," the young lawyer admitted. "The driver of the stage introduced me to a lot of people who were in the store at the time."

"Yes, that ar' is correct," the other assented. "And as I lit out that very night you didn't see hide nor ha'r of me arter that."

"No wonder then that it was difficult for me to recall the particulars of the circumstance," Shelstone remarked.

"Then, too, I was clean down to the bed-rock at the time—flat broke, without even two coppers to jingle together for company sake," the man declared with another grin. "So I wasn't rigged up in good harness as I am now."

"That was not a pleasant situation," Shelstone observed.

"You kin bet your bottom dollar that it wasn't, and you would win every time!" the stranger exclaimed.

"But it wasn't a new experience for me, you understand."

"Is that true?"

"Ob, yes! I am one of the fellers who has had more ups and downs than a man kin shake a stick at in a week!" and the stranger grinned again; "but that is on account of my business, you understand."

"And what is your line?"

"Prospecting; tramping over hill and dale, moor and mountain, hunting for the precious metals."

"Ah, yes; I understand."

"And on that night when I see'd you in Spanish Bar, I was about as clean disgusted as a man could be with the world, for I had had an awful run of ill-luck," the stranger explained.

"You see, the way a man in my line does business is on the grub-stake lead."

"Yes, I comprehend what that is," the young lawyer remarked. "You find some man who is willing to furnish the supplies, and then he has a share in whatever discoveries you may make."

"Exactly! that is the way the business is run," the other assented.

"Wal, I have been at the thing for a good twenty years, and I reckon I have had about as much luck as any of them, 'cos thar ain't no man out of a thousand that strikes a big lead, rich enough, you understand, to set him up for life."

"Yes, I comprehend; it is a sort of lottery, where there a thousand blanks to every prize."

"I reckon a true count would be nigher ten thousand misses to every hit," the Westerner declared.

"Probably so, but you are a far better judge of that than I am."

"Ob, yes, for I have been in it for a heap of years!"

"Wal, as I was a-telling, on this particular night I was feeling awful blue for luck had been running dead ag'in' me for a long time, and, do my best, I couldn't make a strike."

"Old Mulletthead—that is the way we Spanish Barites used for to handle the fat galoot—had been grub-staking me for a couple of trips, but when I got back this time he declared he thought he wouldn't have any more of it in his'n."

"He weakened, eh, as they say out West?" the young lawyer asked.

"Yas, sir, he, crawfished in the worst kind of way. On the afternoon of the day when you struck the camp I had had a talk with the old man and tried my best to get him to take one more hack, for I had run across a certain section of country where I felt sart'in I could strike something, for all the indications pointed that way, but as my supplies gave out jest as I struck inter this hyer region I had to go back."

"It was a pity to be balked right on the threshold of success."

"I never felt so darned mean, and so peskily put out 'bout a thing since I was hatched!" the Westerner declared.

"But the old donkey never was able to see an inch beyond his nose," the miner continued. "And he said he didn't know whether to have anything to do with the matter or not, and so as I tell you, stranger, I was a mighty disconsolate man, for I understood that he meant that he was through."

"I was so down in the mouth that I really didn't know exactly what to do, and I reckon I must have showed by my face that I was feeling pretty badly, for old Mulletthead's darter took it upon herself to inquire what ailed me."

"Wal, now, pard, I always liked that gal, and when it came to downright hard boss sense, the little gal knows more in a minute than her old dad does in a month!"

"Yes, I don't think there is any doubt about that!" Shelstone assented.

"What is the matter, Yankee?" she axed. My name, by the way, is Abner Jones, but everybody out Montana way allers calls me Yankee Jones—leastways when they give me my full handle, but as a rule they let it go as Yankee."

Shelstone nodded.

"Wal, I up and told the leetle gal jest how I was situated. She kinder thought over the thing for a moment, and then she said, said she: 'I reckon, Yankee, you kin have what you want, even if pop ain't agreeable.'"

"How is that?" I axed, mighty surprised, I kin tell you.

"He has allers told me to give you what you wanted, and as he hasn't given any orders to the contrary, I reckon the say-so stands good!"

The young lawyer laughed.

"It takes a woman to see a way out of a difficulty of that kind!" Shelstone declared.

"Your dad will be mad clear through," I allowed.

"Ob, no," she said, said she. "Dad never gets very angry about anything. He will not like it, of course, but after you get the things he cannot help himself. He didn't say right out that you couldn't have them!"

"No, not right out, but I reckon he meant it in that way."

"Wal, that is all right; as long as he didn't really say no, you can take it for granted that he was willing to go on, so give me the order for what things you want, and you shall have them. Dad has gone out of town and will not be back before to-morrow night, so you will have plenty of time to get out of the way."

"You accepted the offer of course."

"You bet!" Yankee Jones exclaimed! "I got my stuff, and lit out that very night for fear the old man might come back ahead of time, and, inside of a week, I struck one of

the richest veins that had ever been found in Montana."

"At first, you understand, it didn't appear as if it was going to pan out anything extra, but arter we got a company formed and developed the thing we discovered that we had got a bonanza, and as it happened both old Mulletthead and myself held on to our quarter interests—we had to give half to the capitalists who found the money to put the thing through."

"So the old man really owes his fortune to his daughter?"

"Every cent of it, and yet he goes blowing round 'bout his business sagacity, when, for a fact, he hardly knows enough to go in when it rains!" the Westerner declared in supreme contempt.

"I am explaining these things to you, pard, because I happened to hear a leetle of the talk between you and the old man, and so I know how things ar'."

"Yes, I see."

"And don't let him bluff you with any hundred thousand dollars a year yarn!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"That is what the mine pays, the hull consarn. The Live Yankee—that is the name of it—is a ripper, but he don't git but twenty-five thousand dollars a year out of it, the same as I do, and that is a mighty big pile for any man to pull in."

"Oh, yes, I agree with you."

Then the Westerner consulted his watch.

"Hello, I am due down-down in a half an hour, so I had better be traveling," rising as he spoke. "You understand how the old thing works now and kin go in and win!"

"Yes, and I am much obliged to you for the information," Shelstone rejoined, also rising.

"Ob, that is all right! I am putting in one lick for you and a dozen for the leetle gal who made all our fortunes."

"By the way, I allers stops at the Fifth Avenue Hotel when I am in town; so, any time when you hav'n't anything better to do drop in and see me; the latch-string is always out!"

Then the pair shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER XII.

A BAFFLED SCHEMER.

ALTHOUGH Jonathan Mullett, Esquire, as he was fond of being termed, strutted away with the air of a man who owned an extremely big slice of the metropolis, yet he was far from being easy in his mind, and just at the present moment "felt mean," as the saying is.

"Ha, hum!" he muttered, as he proceeded toward Broadway; "this is an extremely unfortunate affair, and I thought I had the matter so nicely arranged, too!"

"I am sure it would not have been possible for any one to have acted more cunningly than I did," and he shook his head in a disconsolate way.

"It is very unlucky that the two should happen to meet so as to have an opportunity to arrive at an understanding. It was my calculation that I had put an end to the affair for good and all, but it now appears that I have had all my trouble for nothing," and the old gentleman gave vent to a deep sigh.

"Perhaps, though, the matter is not so bad as I imagine. I know just how the young man feels about it, but it is possible that Pauline may be inclined to listen to reason."

"He spoke so confidently, though, about the matter that it would seem as if he and my daughter have come to an understanding, but it may not be so."

"Some young men are rash about things of this kind and take too much for granted. Perhaps when I come to talk to Pauline she will be guided by my advice?"

He was considerably cheered up by this thought, so hastened to take an up-town car, eager to converse with his daughter about the matter.

The Alhambra, where Mullett had apartments, was one of the elaborate French flat houses, now so common in New York, built on the style of those so popular in Paris.

It was a particularly "swell" flat, the apartments renting for a couple of thousand dollars a year, rejoicing in uniformed door-openers, elevator men, and all the "fixings" which are considered to be necessary for a residence of this kind in the fashionable quarter of the city.

When Mr. Mullett walked into the reception-room he found his wife and daughter busily engaged in discussing the result of a shopping tour which the mother had made.

As the ladies looked at the head of the family they divined at once that he was troubled in mind, and as the daughter had confided to the mother all the particulars of her interview with the young lawyer, not neglecting to admit that she felt sure the old gentleman had been mean enough to intercept the letters which she and Shelstone had written to each other, Mr. Mullett understood what was worrying her husband.

The old lady had a mild and amiable disposition, but also possessed a firm will for all that, and her indignation was excited against her husband for performing so mean a trick, there-

fore she was ready to aid her daughter to the extent of her power.

Mullett had reflected over the matter during his ride up-town, and had come to the conclusion it was best for him to "take the bull by the horns," as the saying is, and come to an immediate understanding with his daughter.

So as soon as he got comfortably seated, he said:

"I had quite a long and interesting conversation with Mr. Shelstone."

"So did I, papa," the daughter remarked in the most innocent manner.

"Ah, yes, I should judge so from what he said to me," Mullett replied, significantly.

"And really, I must say, Pauline, that I am astonished at you!" and then the old gentleman shook his head in an extremely grave way.

"Astonished at me, pa?" the girl exclaimed, pretending to be very much amazed.

"Yes, indeed I am!"

"Why should you be?"

"On account of what this young man said," the father replied.

"And what did he say?"

"Why, he is very much in love with you!"

The girl blushed a little, then laughed.

"Oh, yes, I knew that a year ago, when we were in Spanish Bar," she remarked in a straight-forward, honest way.

"But you see, pa, he was a little uncertain then in regard to his prospects, and so we did not enter into any engagement, for he did not think that under the circumstances it was right to bind me to a promise, but it was understood that just as soon as he became so situated as to afford the luxury of a wife, he would come for me."

"Yes, that is what he said," Mullett observed, slowly, and in a rather melancholy way, for the thought had come to him that he was not going to have any better luck in trying to dissuade his daughter from the union than he had with the young lawyer.

"It is the truth, pa."

"But, why didn't either you or this young gentleman say something to me about the matter?" Mullett asked in a complaining way.

"Because, as I have just explained, there wasn't really any engagement, and we did not think it necessary to consult you until we came to a definite conclusion," the girl replied.

"Ah, yes, I see."

"No doubt Mr. Shelstone would have called upon you soon if you had not happened to meet him to-day," Pauline explained.

"Yes, yes, I presume so," the old gentleman remarked in an absent way.

And then, suddenly screwing his courage up to the sticking point, he exclaimed with a frown:

"I am very sorry indeed that you encouraged this young man, for he is not at all the kind of a husband that I would have selected for you!"

Both the mother and daughter affected to be very much surprised by this declaration.

"Why, you seemed to think a great deal of the gentleman when he boarded with us at Spanish Bar!" Mrs. Mullett declared.

"Yes, pa, you assuredly did, and you used to joke with me in regard to his attentions, don't you remember?" Pauline asked.

"No, I don't remember anything about it!" the old gentleman exclaimed, testily.

"And if I did joke with you about him I had no idea that anything would come of the matter—I did not think there was anything serious in it, and then too you don't seem to take the fact into consideration that there is a great deal of difference between the little, dirty mining-camp of Spanish Bar and this magnificent metropolis."

"Why, pa, what on earth has that got to do with it?" the girl exclaimed in wonder.

"Yes, Jonathan, I don't see that it should make any difference," the old lady declared.

"Oh, you women do not seem to have any head for business!" Mullett replied in a disgusted way.

"Are you able to perceive that there is any difference between our position now and the way we were situated in Spanish Bar?" the old gentleman demanded in an angry way.

"Oh, yes," the girl replied, immediately. "We were poor then, and had a hard time to get along."

"While now we are rolling in wealth!" the little, old gentleman exclaimed in a grandiloquent manner.

"I understand all about that, of course," the girl remarked.

"And I presume that your idea is that although Mr. Shelstone may have been a suitable match for me in Spanish Bar, when I was the daughter of a poor man, he is not an eligible suitor now, here in New York, since you have acquired wealth."

"Yes, that is the idea exactly!" the old gentleman exclaimed, rubbing his hands briskly together.

"And I trust you are sensible enough to see that I am correct in my ideas about the matter," the father added.

"I am afraid that you will think I am very stupid, for I do not agree with you at all!" Pauline declared, firmly.

"Neither do I, husband, and it is my notion

that you are altogether wrong!" Mrs. Mullett exclaimed.

"Well, well, is it possible?" the old gentleman cried, pretending to be greatly astonished. "Are you both against me? I am amazed—in fact, never was more surprised in all my life!"

"When Mr. Shelstone took a fancy to me I was a poor girl, and neither he nor I had any idea that I would ever be anything else," Pauline remarked. "He loved me for myself, not because I had any money, or expected to have any, and now because you happened to become wealthy is no reason why I should break faith with him, and I most decidedly will not do it!"

"My dear child, is it possible that you will refuse to obey my commands in this matter?" the old, fat gentleman exclaimed, rising to his feet, and attempting to look extremely dignified.

"Well, father, I hate to have to take such a step, but under the circumstances I don't see what else I can do," the girl replied, in the frankest manner.

"And it really isn't my fault, either," she continued. "You force me to take the step by assuming the position that you do," she continued. "It is I who will have to live with the man, and share his fortunes, good or bad, not you."

"I am of age, father, and I think I am fully competent to judge for myself about this matter."

"I do not ask or expect any of your money, you know," she added. "And I am quite sure that Mr. Shelstone doesn't care where I am poor or rich."

"In fact, he had no idea that you had become wealthy until I told him, so no one can accuse him of seeking to marry me because I am the daughter of a rich man."

"Pauline is right!" the mother declared.

"And in my opinion she would be very foolish indeed to give up the man she loves just because he does not happen to be as rich as you are."

"It is just a waste of time to try to argue with you women!" the old gentleman declared, indignantly.

"You know that I intend to go to France with the idea of prosecuting my claim to the ancient Mullett estates, and, undoubtedly, as my daughter you will be received in the best society and can select a noble husband—a man with a pedigree as long as my arm!"

"Well, I am not anxious to marry any foreign nobleman!" the young woman declared, spiritedly.

"From what I have read about these foreign counts and barons who marry American girls the majority of them are a lot of scamps who are simply after the American dollars, and take the girl because they cannot get the money without her."

"Ah, you must not believe these ridiculous newspaper reports!" the old gentleman exclaimed.

"My heart is set upon your marrying a foreign nobleman, and I will never be willing to give my consent to your marrying a common, ordinary lawyer like this Mr. Shelstone!"

"Well, pa, I am sorry to have to go against your wishes, but as I have given my promise to the gentleman you may rest assured I shall keep it!" Pauline declared, firmly.

"I shall not have him come here, you know! I shall put my foot down firmly in regard to that!" the old gentleman blustered.

"Now, Jonathan, don't be foolish!" the mother protested. "We have invited the gentleman to call, and if he comes, as he certainly will, most decidedly I am not going to have the door closed in his face."

"And, pa, you must not imagine that you can force me to do as you please by any such treatment!" Pauline cried, spiritedly. "If I cannot receive my friends in your house then I will go elsewhere."

"Well, well, you are both of you in open rebellion, eh?" Mullett exclaimed in amazement.

A knock at the door and the entrance of a servant with a couple of cards on a salver interrupted the conversation at this point.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BARON.

"BARON ST. GERMAINE and Major Buffam," said Mullett, reading the inscription engraved on the cards.

"Show the gentlemen into the library and say that I will join them in a few moments," the old gentleman ordered.

The servant departed.

"This Baron St. Germaine is the kind of gentleman whom I would like to see you take a fancy to, Pauline," Mullett remarked.

"He seems to be a very pleasant sort of gentleman," the girl observed in an indifferent way. "But I do not think I could ever bring myself to take a liking to any of these foreigners."

"There is something about them that I do not fancy."

"That is just a foolish idea on your part!" the father declared, with an air of superior wisdom.

"The baron is the finest gentleman that I

have ever met, and this Major Buffam is a friend who has just arrived in the country, a young man who is making the grand tour around the world; comes from one of the wealthiest families in France, but as he is a younger son—the cadet of the house—as the baron calls him, he does not bear a title.

"I shall take an early opportunity of introducing you, Pauline."

"Really, pa, I had just as lief you wouldn't," the girl replied.

"I do not care for the baron, and I do not believe I would take any interest in his friends."

"I don't like these foreigners, anyway!" she added, abruptly.

"Oh, that is just a notion on your part, and you will get over it just as soon as you get well acquainted with them, so as to understand what really splendid fellows they are."

"But I must not keep them waiting!" and then the old man bustled out of the room.

"I had an idea that pa expected I would take a fancy to this baron," Pauline remarked, after the door closed behind Mullett. "For he has been singing his praises ever since he became acquainted with the man."

"Well, I am like you, Pauline," the mother observed. "I do not care much for these foreigners. This baron certainly appears to be very nice, and he is very polite and agreeable, but somehow the thought will come to me that, maybe, if he didn't think your pa was so rich, he might not be so anxious to be on good terms with us."

"I should not be surprised if that is the truth, and, as the boys used to say in Spanish Bar, I do not take any stock in the man."

"Pa, too, has made the biggest kind of a mistake if he thinks he can induce me to give up Mr. Shelstone by the use of either persuasion or threats, for I have made up my mind about the matter," the girl declared, firmly.

"That is right, dear, stick to it!" the mother exclaimed.

"I should really be ashamed to have a daughter of mine give up the man she loved on account of a mere whim."

Leaving the two ladies to continue their conversation which is of no particular interest to the reader, we will follow the footsteps of the old gentleman to the library.

Mullett was a man who could not boast of much education, and had very little taste for reading, but when he took possession of his apartments he found that one of them was designated as a library, and as he wanted to have everything the same as his neighbors he had the room filled up with book-cases filled with a choice selection of volumes, nicely bound, not ten of which had the master of the house opened since they were put in their places.

When Mullett entered the room he found there two foreign-looking gentlemen.

One, the elder of the two, was a tall, dark man with prominent features, keen, black eyes, as restless as the orbs of a hawk, and a full short beard of the same hue.

He was elaborately dressed, wore costly jewelry, and was apparently the very pink of a fine gentleman, but a careful and close observer would have detected that there was a sinister and suspicious look about the man.

His companion was younger, and a blonde, looking more like a German than a son of Gaul. He too wore a full beard, and had rather smallish features, but was a good-looking young fellow.

"Ah, my dear Mullett, I am delighted to see you!" the baron exclaimed, rising as he spoke and shaking hands with the old gentleman as though he was the nearest and dearest friend that he had in the world.

He Frenchified the Montana man's name, putting a strong accent on the "lay."

"Allow me to have the pleasure of introducing my old comrade-in-arms, Major Louis Buffam."

The young man shook hands with Mullett and in a few well-chosen words expressed the pleasure which it gave him to make the acquaintance of the "American gentleman."

"The major is going to stay for a month or two with me in the city and, my dear Mullett, you and I must do the honors—we must show him the sights."

"Ah, yes, I shall be pleased," the old gentleman responded.

"Although Mullett here is not so young as he once was you will find him to be a man of the right sort!" the baron exclaimed, slapping the Montana man familiarly on the back.

"He knows all the points around town as well as the gayest young man in New York," the Frenchman continued.

"Aha! a sad rogue is our friend here when he once gets started."

Then Mullett grinned and chuckled, very much delighted by the soft impeachment.

"You mustn't believe what the baron says, major!" the old man declared. "He means that he is the sad rogue, not I; but I say, gentlemen, will you join me in a glass of wine?"

"Certainly! we will be delighted, eh, major?" the baron exclaimed.

"I shall be honored," the other declared, with an elaborate bow.

"What will you have—champagne? I can

recommend it!" Mullett declared, rubbing his fat hands together after his favorite fashion.

"So can I! It is superb!" the baron averred.

"Our dear Mulette is a capital judge of wine, and his champagne is equal to any that I have ever drunk in Paris, which has the best wine in the world!" the Frenchman continued.

"Oh, yes, I know a good wine when I see it!" the old gentleman exclaimed, with a chuckle.

Then he rung for a servant and ordered a bottle of wine.

"Sit down, gentlemen, and make yourselves comfortable!" Mullett observed, in a hospitable way.

"This is Liberty Hall as far as my friends are concerned."

The three seated themselves.

"You can perceive from his brisk, vivacious way that our dear Mulette is of French descent," the baron remarked.

"He comes of the old Gascon family, and I have hunted in his ancestral woods a hundred times."

"Ah, yes, and if I remember rightly, there is a lawsuit now going on in regard to the title and the estates," the major remarked in a thoughtful way.

"You read some of the particulars in the newspapers, no doubt?" the baron suggested.

"Yes, I presume so."

"It is very probable, for accounts of the contest have been published from time to time."

"All the direct heirs are dead," the baron continued, "and so a half a hundred of distant relatives are endeavoring to secure the rich prize, but from what our dear Mulette here has told me in regard to his family, I am satisfied that his claim is better than any of the rest, and he will soon depart for Paris to secure his rights."

The servant made his appearance at this moment with the wine.

He opened the bottle, filled the glasses, then departed.

"We will drink to the success of our dear Mulette!" the baron declared.

CHAPTER XIV.

GALLIC COUNCIL.

THE toast was duly drank, and then the old gentleman pressed the pair to fill their glasses again.

"Aha! my dear major, did I not tell you that our host was a rare blade?" the baron cried.

"He is no longer young, but that does not make any difference, the fire of youth is in his veins just the same!"

"Yes, yes, gentlemen, I never knew what it was to feel old!" Mullett declared, boastfully.

"But, my dear major, let me caution you in regard to one thing," the baron remarked in a serious way.

"If you value your money, do not let our dear Mulette here persuade you to play cards, for if you do, I give you my word of honor as a gentleman, that he will win all you stake almost before you know it."

"Oh, Sir Baron, I am not quite so skillful as all that!" the old fellow cried, with a chuckle, highly delighted.

"You know me of old, major," the baron observed.

"You know that I am a bold and reckless gamster, and a man who is unusually lucky, but I give you my word that when I sit down to play with our dear Mulette here I am as a child compared to him."

"He, he, he!" laughed the old man. "Come, come, baron, you are laying it on altogether too strong!"

"Oh, no, it is the truth!" the Frenchman protested. "Why, the other night he completely cleaned me out before we had been playing an hour."

"Yes, on that occasion I certainly was extremely lucky," Mullett observed, with a deal of complacency.

"Ah, it was not only luck, but skill," the other responded.

"You held good cards, it is true, but if you had not been an expert player, and so known exactly how to use your cards, you would not have been able to have achieved so great a success."

"Yes, I was always counted to be a very careful and scientific player," the old gentleman declared, in a bashful way.

"It is the truth!" the baron exclaimed. "You are the most dangerous man at cards that I ever encountered, and therefore, my dear major, I must warn you to beware of him."

Mullett chuckled and insisted upon filling the glasses.

"My dear baron, this description that you give of Monsieur Mulette's skill at cards makes me eager to ascertain for myself just how great a foeman he is, and I assure you I shall take the first favorable opportunity to test the matter," the young Frenchman declared.

"We can get up a little game to-night," the old gentleman remarked.

"We can go to that club-house where we were night before last, baron," Mullett con-

tinued. "That was a nice quiet place for a little game."

"Well, unfortunately, I am engaged for the next few nights, but during the last of the week I will be at liberty," the major remarked.

"I will be glad to encounter you at any time" the old gentleman observed, rubbing his hands briskly together.

"Put plenty of money in your pocket, major," the baron remarked. "For I can assure you that you will need it; or, perhaps, it would be better for me to advise you to take very little money with you, for then your losses will not be so great."

They all laughed at this, Mullett the loudest of the three.

"We will have a jolly time anyway!" the Montana man declared.

"By the way, I saw you out walking yesterday with your lovely daughter," the baron remarked, to Mullett.

"You must introduce the major here to your charming child," he continued. "You will find this gentleman's daughter, major, a perfect type of a rare American beauty."

"You have traveled much, like myself, have seen the dark-eyed daughters of sunny France, the olive-hued maids of Siam and Italy, and the blue-eyed, golden-haired charms of the Teuton race, but after you see this fair American girl I think you will own that she is worthy a place with any of them!"

"I shall be delighted at the honor," the young Frenchman declared.

The old fellow was much pleased by the warm words of praise bestowed upon his child and took no pains to conceal the fact.

"Yes, yes, she is a pretty girl and I have got the rocks to back up her good looks!" he declared.

The wine was making him boastful.

And then the idea came to him that these able, experienced men of the world might be able to give him some good advice how to break up the attachment which had grown up between his daughter and the young lawyer.

If it had not been for the wine getting into his head it is doubtful if he would have been so imprudent as to speak of his family matters to a pair of comparative strangers.

"But when the idea came to him, it seemed to be a good one, and he determined to act upon it."

"You are pleased to be complimentary in regard to my daughter," the old gentleman remarked.

"Oh, no, my dear Mulette, I was simply speaking the truth," the baron replied.

"Well, I may be prejudiced in regard to her, that is only natural, you know, but I think she is a remarkably good-looking girl," the father observed.

"Oh, yes, my dear fellow, there is not the slightest doubt in regard to that," the baron declared.

"But sometimes the thought comes to me that it would be just as well if she was not quite so attractive," the old gentleman observed, slowly.

His companions looked at him in surprise.

"Well, really, my dear Mulette, I don't see why you should think in that way," the baron remarked.

"Oh, I have a good reason for it, you may be sure of that," Mullett replied.

"Undoubtedly!" the baron immediately assented.

"I know you well enough to be certain that you would not speak without being provided with a good and sufficient reason," the Frenchman continued, with a polite bow.

"The major, of course, does not know you as I do," he added.

"Our friend here, dear Mulette, is a bright and wonderful example of the practical, hard-headed American, the greatest race of men on earth as far as business is concerned."

"Although our friend is a direct descendant of one of the noblest of the ancient French families, yet as he was born and brought up here on the soil of the New World, he is to all intents and purposes an American of the Americans."

The old fellow was very much pleased by this open and gross flattery, and plainly showed his satisfaction in his face.

"Yes, yes, we Americans are a practical, go-ahead race, there is no mistake about that," the Montana man observed, with a deal of satisfaction.

"And that perhaps accounts for the fact that we allow our women folks more liberty than the women of any other nation on earth enjoy."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly that is correct," the baron assented.

"And, sometimes, I am inclined to believe that we Americans make a mistake in allowing our women folks so much liberty," the old gentleman observed with a grave shake of the head.

"Ah, yes, it is possible," the baron remarked, imitating old Mullett's wag of the head.

"Still, I must say that since my sojourn in the country I have found the American ladies to be extremely charming," the acute Frenchman declared.

"Very true, I don't doubt that our women compare more than favorably with those of any

other land, but just consider the danger they run by being allowed so much freedom!" the old gentleman declared.

"My dear fellow, I do not comprehend your meaning," the baron remarked.

"Pray explain! how are they exposed to any danger?"

"Well, take my daughter for instance."

"Yes?"

"She is a handsome girl, and as it is well-known that I am one of the mining millionaires, it is understood by everybody who knows anything about the subject that she will inherit my fortune."

"Very true—that is easily comprehended," the baron observed.

"Now if my daughter should happen to fall in love with some poor man—some fortune-hunter—you can see what a bad business it would turn out to be."

There was a rapid exchange of significant glances between the two Frenchmen, but as the old gentleman was employed in filling the glasses with the last of the wine at the time he did not notice the looks.

"You are right—it would be signally unfortunate," the baron admitted.

"And, my dear friend, while I do not wish to appear as having a desire to pry into your private personal matters, yet the interest I take in you impels me to ask, do you think there is danger of your charming daughter making a mistake of the kind?" the Frenchman continued in an extremely sympathetic way.

The old fellow shook his head and assumed a melancholy air.

"My dear baron, I am greatly afraid that there is," he replied.

"You amaze me beyond expression!" the other declared.

"In a few words I can explain the matter," Mullett remarked.

"A year or so ago while I was in the West, occupied in developing my valuable mining property," he continued with the air of a man who owned the fee simple of a half-a-dozen States, "my daughter made the acquaintance of a young man, a civil engineer by profession."

"I have nothing against the fellow, mind you, excepting that he is as poor as a church mouse and, of course, no match for my girl."

CHAPTER XV.

WAYS AND MEANS.

THE baron appeared to meditate over the affair for a few moments, and then he shook his head in a serious way.

"It would be folly for a lady situated as your daughter is to think of marrying such a man!" the Frenchman declared.

"He is an adventurer, of course, and is attracted by your daughter because she is your heiress," the major observed.

"It is monstrous to think that any man should dare to try such a game!" he continued in a fine burst of indignation.

"But, I presume, Miss Pauline is perfectly satisfied that the gentleman is attracted by her own charms, and not by the fact that you are one of the great American millionaires," the baron suggested, shrewdly.

"Oh, yes, girls will take such romantic notions into their heads," the old gentleman remarked in an awkward way.

He knew he was mistating the case, but he preferred to let it go in that way.

"Well, if I were you, I think I would be justified under the circumstances, in adopting some stringent measures," the baron remarked, with the air of a man who was giving deep thought to the matter.

"Ah, yes, no doubt about it!" the major chimed in.

"Most decidedly, if I were in your place, I would not allow my daughter to fall the prey of a fortune-hunter," the young Frenchman continued, in righteous scorn.

"Oh, yes, I agree with you that I ought to do something, but the difficulty is to decide exactly what to do," the old fellow observed, in deep perplexity.

"You have tried to reason with your daughter, I presume?" the baron remarked.

"Certainly, but she is headstrong, and thinks she knows better about the matter than I do," the father replied.

"She is determined to stick to the man then in spite of your objection?" the baron asked, reflectively.

"Yes, she is inclined to be very obstinate about the matter."

"Young people—particularly young girls, will be rash and hot-headed, when it comes to the affairs of the heart," the baron observed, with the air of a sage.

"Yes, I am satisfied that it would be only an idle waste of words for me to attempt to talk her out of the matter," Mullett declared.

"Oh, truly! I am well aware that it is one of the hardest tasks in the world to persuade a woman to give up an idea when she has once taken it into her head," the baron assented.

"I am satisfied that talking will not be of any avail, and I am really at a loss to know what to do!" Mullett remarked.

"It might be possible for you to buy the man off," the baron suggested.

"You might make the threat that if the marriage took place you would disinherit your daughter, so that he could not gain anything by marrying her, and then offer to give him a handsome sum to take himself off to parts unknown," the baron advised.

Mullett shook his head.

"Oh, no, that would not do at all," he declared.

"You don't think the game could be worked?" the Frenchman asked.

"No, I am satisfied that it could not be," the old fellow replied. "You see, both my girl and the man appear to be perfectly indifferent in regard to money matters."

"Oh, of course, the fellow would profess to be," the baron remarked, with a sneer.

"If we were in Paris now I could easily suggest a way out of the difficulty," the major observed.

"How is that, my dear major," Mullett asked.

"Why, I would take it upon myself to get rid of the man," the young Frenchman declared, in a swaggering way.

"I am an excellent shot, you comprehend, and with the sword I have never yet met my master," he continued, boastfully.

"And if we were in Paris, as I said, I would take an early opportunity to tread upon this fellow's toes in such a way that he could not help taking notice of the matter, and then I would invite him to meet me, with his friend, in some nice, quiet place, where I would speedily put him in such a condition that he would not be apt to trouble your daughter again!"

"Ah! the scheme is a beautiful one!" the baron declared, enthusiastically. "But I fear it cannot be worked in this country. New York is not Paris, you know."

"Exactly; and that is the trouble," the old gentleman remarked, with a doubtful shake of the head.

"No, no; I do not think the affair can be arranged in that way," he continued.

"Peste! it is bad!" the baron exclaimed. "But do not despair, my dear Mulette, we will find some way to arrange the matter."

"What? shall we three men of brains be baffled by a little problem of this kind?" the Frenchman exclaimed, in a theatrical way.

"Oh, no! perish the thought! We must find some means to get the man out of the way, and we will do it, too!"

"You see, it is not the custom in this country for men to fight duels as it is in France," the old gentleman explained. "And if you should attempt to force this man into a quarrel by insulting him, the chances are that he would knock you down, and if you are not a good boxer there is a strong probability that he would manage to give you a terrible thrashing."

An indignant look appeared on the face of the young Frenchman.

"This is utterly barbarous!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible that the American gentlemen settle their disputes with their fists after the fashion of the professional John Bull boxers?"

"Yes, our friend Mulette is right," the baron observed. "Duelling is not common in this country for the law frowns severely on it."

"That is true," the old gentleman remarked. "In the Southern States men do fight duels once in a while, and if one man succeeds in killing the other there is not much said, or done, about it, but if such a result attended a duel up here in the North the victor would speedily find himself in jail, and he might consider himself extremely lucky if he was not hung for murder."

"You see, my dear major, these Americans are, as I said, an extremely hard-headed and practical people," the baron observed with a grave shake of the head.

"It is unfortunate, for it is plain that my plan will not work," the major remarked.

"Oh, no, there is no chance," the old gentleman declared.

"We must put our wits to work and see if we cannot devise some scheme!" the baron exclaimed.

"Peste! it will not do for three able and experienced men of the world like ourselves to be beaten by a paltry matter of this kind," the Frenchman continued.

"There must be some way, and if we seek long enough we will be sure to find it," he added.

"It surely seems as if there ought to be some way to arrange it," the old gentleman declared.

"Let us get a clear idea of the affair," the baron observed in a reflective way.

"This man is a civil engineer?"

"Yes," Mullett answered.

"Young?"

"Twenty-five or thereabouts."

"Good-looking and gentlemanly, I presume, or else your charming daughter would never have taken it into her head to fall in love with him?"

"Oh, yes, he is an attractive fellow."

"Understand, my dear friend Mulette, the major and myself are in earnest in this matter,

and we propose to arrange this affair if it is possible, eh, major?"

"Oh, yes, baron, I am entirely at Monsieur Mullett's service," the young Frenchman announced.

"I am very much obliged to you indeed," the old gentleman responded, very much delighted at finding the pair so willing to assist him.

The baron produced a memorandum-book and a pencil.

"Now, then, let us proceed in a systematic way," the Frenchman remarked.

"How call you the name of this young man?"

"Jeremiah Shelstone," the old gentleman answered.

"A civil engineer, you said?"

"Yes."

"Where can he be found?"

"At the office of the railway company by whom he is employed, I presume."

"Ah, yes, and the name of the company?"

Mullett gave it, and the Frenchman made a note of the matter.

"Do you know aught else of the man—his habits, or any particulars regarding him?" the baron asked.

"No, I can't say that I do," the old gentleman replied in a thoughtful way.

"You see, the fact is I have only seen him once since coming to New York, and all I know about him is what I gathered in a single interview."

"I happened to meet him just by accident in company with my daughter," Mullett explained.

"And although I was amazed at seeing them together, for I had no idea that they had met since coming to New York, yet I managed to conceal the feeling."

"Then I got an opportunity to speak to the man, and told him that I did not approve of his attentions to my daughter."

"I will do him the justice to say that he was polite and good-natured about the matter, but for all that he was not inclined to give up the girl."

"And she, on her part, was equally resolute, I presume," the baron remarked.

"Oh, yes. Well, as I commenced to explain, all I know about the young man is what I learned during the few weeks that he lived in the mining-camp out West. I happened to have my family with me, and that is how the young man made my daughter's acquaintance."

"Ah, yes; I comprehend."

"He is a quiet, gentlemanly man enough, as far as I know; but he hasn't any money, and his family doesn't amount to anything, two very serious objections to his marriage with my daughter."

"Oh, yes, decidedly," the baron declared.

"But he persists in his suit, notwithstanding your objections."

"Certainly! is quite firm about the matter," the old gentleman replied. "I suppose he feels sure of the girl; she is of age, you know, and if she insists upon marrying the man I will not be able to prevent it."

"Yes, yes; I understand!"

Then the baron rested his chin on his hand and appeared to be plunged in deep thought for a few moments.

Finally he spoke again:

"My dear Mulette, it seems to me that this is one of the cases where, if a man cannot succeed in gaining his purpose by fair means he is justified in using foul," the baron declared.

"Yes, undoubtedly so," the major asserted.

"I consider that it is your duty to prevent your daughter from entering into an alliance of this kind by any means in your power," the baron continued.

"Yes, I agree with you, and, really, I do not care much how the work is accomplished provided it is successful," the old gentleman responded.

"It will cost some money, of course, for tools must be employed, and fellows who do work of the kind have a greedy and an itching palm."

"Oh, yes, I understand that, and I shall not grudge the money, as I will consider it well spent if I can succeed in breaking off the engagement."

"Since I have been in New York I have met a couple of young fellows whom I knew in Paris," the baron explained.

"Men of good families, but they have led such wild lives that none of their relatives will have anything to do with them, and, in fact, they got into so much mischief that they were obliged to fly from France."

"You comprehend, my dear Mulette, such fellows would not be apt to hesitate at much of anything short of murder, provided they were well paid for their services."

"Oh, yes, but there will not be any need of violence, eh?" asked Mullett, nervously.

"Certainly not, my dear fellow, what do you take me for?" the baron exclaimed as if shocked by the remark.

"Well, I thought not, but you see I don't exactly comprehend your plan," the old gentleman explained.

"It is a very simple one," the baron remarked.

"From what I have seen of your daughter I

have got the idea that she is a proud girl who would be deeply sensitive if any disgrace should attach itself to her."

"Oh, yes, I do not doubt that she would feel very badly about it."

"Exactly, that is what I imagined," the Frenchman observed.

"This is the little game then," he continued. "I will enlist the aid of these wild young blades from Paris, and employ them to make the acquaintance of the youth and get on familiar terms with him."

"Yes, yes, I comprehend," the old gentleman exclaimed, rubbing his hands briskly together.

"Then when they have succeeded in gaining his confidence they will lure him to some vile den and have it arranged so that he will be captured by the police," the baron continued.

"Ah, yes, and then I suppose they will contrive so that all the particulars of the affair will get into the newspapers?" the old gentleman exclaimed, with a chuckle.

"Exactly! and when your daughter reads the description there is little doubt but what she will become disgusted with a man who has no better sense than to get caught in such a trap," the wily baron remarked, with a knowing smile.

"The scheme is a beautiful one!" the major declared. "But it is much more complex and complicated than my dueling idea, and it is unfortunate that we are not in Paris where there would not be any difficulty in carrying out my plan."

"Yes, my dear major, but it would not be possible to force him into a duel in this country," Mullett declared.

"Oh, no, my scheme will work all right, for there is little doubt about my men making a success of it, as they are clever rascals," the baron remarked.

"Really, you understand, my dear Mulette, they are men of decided genius in a certain way, and if they are given to understand that they can make a good bit of money there is not much doubt they will accomplish their object."

"The only objection that I can see to the scheme is that, as far as I know, the youth is a steady-going, sober sort of a young fellow, and it may not be possible for the men of whom you speak to induce him to join them in a trip of this kind," Mullett remarked, after thinking the matter over for a few moments.

"Do not trouble yourself about that!" the baron exclaimed, in the most confident manner.

"These fellows are really geniuses in their way," the Frenchman continued.

"And when I give them to understand that if they make a success they will get—By the way, my dear Mulette, how much cash would you be willing to give for this service?" the baron asked, abruptly.

"Well, I don't exactly know," the old gentleman replied. "I will have to trust to your judgment in regard to that matter. Get the fellows as cheap as you can, of course."

For all that he boasted himself to be one of the great mining-kings of the country, Mullett was noted for keeping a tight hold on his cash.

The acute Frenchman shook his head in a grave way.

"My dear friend, you will make a great mistake if you attempt to drive a hard bargain with these wild blades," the baron declared.

"Oh, yes, a course of that kind would be decidedly unwise," the major asserted.

"You must bear in mind that this is not an ordinary commercial transaction, where you haggle and play the Jew in the bargain."

"On the contrary, it is one of those delicate affairs, where the utmost caution must be observed," he continued.

"If you say to these men, 'Here, my friends, I want this piece of work done; the scheme must be arranged in such a way so that, no matter whether you fail or succeed, it will not be possible for any one to discover that I had anything to do with the plot, and if you succeed you will find me a liberal paymaster,' the odds are a hundred to one that the fellows, thus encouraged, will make a success out of it."

"Oh, yes, the baron is right," the major asserted.

"I have had occasion to deal with men of this kind two or three times, and I am satisfied that if one attempts to haggle with the rascals he will not be apt to get good work out of them."

"It is certain," the baron declared, in an imperative way.

"Believe me, my dear friend, Mulette, I know what I am talking about," the Frenchman continued.

"Make men of this stamp believe that you are prepared to deal liberally with them, and they will do their utmost for you, but once let them get the idea into their heads that you are inclined to drive a hard bargain, and be close with them in money matters, and you can rest assured that you will find them only lukewarm in their zeal."

"Well, I presume that is the case," Mullett observed.

"You certainly ought to know, and it appears to be reasonable," the old gentleman continued.

"Yes, yes, I am sure that the baron is right!" the major exclaimed.

"What do you think the affair ought to cost?" the old gentleman asked in his cautious way.

"Well, that depends upon the number of men," the baron replied.

"It may be possible, you know, that a couple will be able to do the job without any trouble," he continued.

"But in case it should prove to be an extra difficult task, the two men, whom I have in my mind's eye, might need to engage a couple more."

"Yes, I understand," Mullett remarked.

"The principal thing about this affair is to arrange it so that it must be successful," the baron asserted.

"It may be possible that it will be a difficult task to get this fellow away, if he is a steady man, not inclined to dissipation," the Frenchman continued.

"I have an idea that he is a very steady fellow," the old gentleman remarked.

"In that case then he must be lured away," the baron announced.

"You can depend upon these bright fellows to set such a cunning trap that he will be sure to fall into it."

"If a part of the scheme is to get him under the influence of liquor I don't believe it can be done, for I am pretty certain that he is not a drinking man," Mullett declared.

"It will make the game more difficult, but it can be played!" the baron rejoined in a confident way.

"By some trick he can be lured to a den, and then my men can get into a quarrel—one of them can be shot or stabbed—not dangerously, you understand, and the rest will swear that the young man was the one who committed the assault."

"It is an ugly scheme," Mullett observed, a little nervously.

"And it will cost about three hundred dollars," the baron declared.

Mullett was astonished at the largeness of the sum, but as he had become committed to the plan, he agreed to give the money, and getting out his check-book, wrote a check for the amount.

"Good! Within a week I will have the affair settled!" the baron exclaimed.

Then they drank success to the scheme, and the two Frenchmen departed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PROGRAMME.

AFTER leaving the house, the baron and major proceeded down Broadway, feeling in a particularly happy state of mind.

"It seems to me, baron, that everything is going on remarkably well," the major remarked.

"Oh, yes, you are correct about that," the baron replied.

"If I had had the arranging of the entire matter, I could not have fixed the thing better."

"Our dear friend Mullett is an extremely singular man," the younger Frenchman declared, with a laugh.

"Yes, yes, a very strange compound!" the baron replied, with a cynical laugh.

"How eagerly he took the bait when I suggested that if this unwelcome suitor for his daughter's hand could not be removed by fair means, then foul might be adopted."

"The old gentleman did not stop to consider that by employing us to arrange a trap for the man, he was placing himself in our power."

"That is true, but you see, all he thought of was to break up the attachment between him and his daughter," the baron remarked.

"Yes, I understand, he was pushing on blindly to that end, regardless of all else."

"As I observed, Mullett is a very singular compound," the baron said in a reflective way.

"In some respects he is a shrewd, practical, hard-headed man of business, the sort of fellow, you understand, that it would be extremely difficult for any one to make a fool of, yet approach him in another direction and he is as great a gull as I ever encountered."

"Just the sort of fellow to be persuaded that the moon is made of green cheese, as the countrymen say."

"Exactly, you have hit it!" the baron responded.

"Take the French estate business for instance," he continued.

"During the first conversation that we had together he told me that he was of French descent, and I, prompt to seize upon an advantage, immediately told him the story of the contest of the distant heirs for the title and estates of the Marquis de Mullett, suggesting that as it was a well known fact that the direct descendant of the marquis had emigrated to America it was extremely probable he was the real heir to the title and estate."

"And the old gull swallowed the bait immediately."

"Oh, yes, took it down at a single gulp!" responded the baron with a laugh.

"I can see that he firmly believes that all he has to do is to go to France to be put in possession of the property."

"That is because I have been industriously engaged in persuading him to that effect ever since the subject came up."

"Some of these republican Americans are queer fish, you understand," the baron continued with a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"They profess to be very proud because they haven't any kings, princes, or other nobility in this country, and yet a great many of them are always ready to prostrate themselves before the men of rank who come from the Old World."

"So it appears, and it is a strange fact, too."

"Now take this old gull: it is the dearest ambition of his heart to prove that he is a descendant of a noble French family, and the principal reason why he is so anxious to break off this engagement between his daughter and the young engineer is because he hopes to marry her to some foreign nobleman."

"When a man gets such ideas in his head it is a sort of insanity, eh?" the major suggested, with a laugh.

"Yes, you are right, it certainly seems to be that way."

"I presume you have already entered the race as a suitor for the daughter's hand?" the young Frenchman suggested.

"Oh, yes, in a case of this kind you would depend upon my putting my best foot forward immediately!" the baron declared.

"And is the girl as great a fool as her father?" the major asked.

"Oh, no, I do not think she is troubled in that way at all," the other replied.

"Before I had met her I had come to the conclusion that I would have an easy conquest; I judged her, you see, by what I knew of the father; but, to my surprise, I found she was altogether different, and I can tell you candidly that though I have always considered myself to be quite a lady-killer, yet I do not think I stand any chance to make this American belle fall in love with me."

"That is bad!"

"It was a rich prize and I tried my best to make a favorable impression on the girl. I am a good talker, you know, and have been very successful with women, but this one is a plain, straight-forward little minx, and I can see that the fact of my being a distinguished member of the French nobility has no influence upon her, notwithstanding the fact that the old man did all he could to aid me in my suit."

"You cannot win her then?"

"By fair means, no, but by some cunning scheme I may be able to compromise her in such a way that she will be forced to wed me," the baron responded with a cold and evil smile.

"Ah, yes, I did not think of that!" the major exclaimed. "Undoubtedly such a game could be played without any trouble."

"Yes, with a man like myself to engineer the scheme," the baron observed with a complacent smile.

"But what is this idea of yours of allowing the old man to win your money at cards?" the other asked.

"Of course, I can comprehend that you allowed him to win, for it is out of the question for any such stupid old fool, as he is, to get the best of you at any game unless you allowed him so to do."

"Ah, yes, that is true, of course. I am a hawk of hawks, a man who has cut his eye-teeth in competition with the greatest gamblers in Europe, and it is the height of absurdity to imagine that this stupid old fool would be able to ever hold his own with me at cards, much less win my money."

"Certainly I am aware of that."

"You know me of old, and you know that I usually play a very deep game," the baron declared with the air of a man who considered himself to be a great genius.

"Ah, yes, you are a very king of 'Greeks,'" the major exclaimed, admiringly.

In the modern slang of Europe, a "Greek" is a sharper, a man who lives by his wits, just as the careless children of genius are called Bohemians, although few of the tribe are natives of that country.

"But I am not always successful, for sometimes the conditions are such that as man, no matter how skillful he may be, is able to carry out his game."

"Oh, yes, that is certainly true. A man cannot command events," the major remarked with the air of a philosopher.

"I have fought the world long enough to thoroughly appreciate that part," the baron remarked. "And therefore I always try to have half-a-dozen strings to my bow."

"And there is where you are wise!" the other exclaimed.

"Now then, as soon as I made the acquaintance of this wealthy American—who is a perfect fool in some respects—I immediately came to the conclusion that he would prove to be an extremely fat pigeon who would be well worth the plucking if he was handled rightly."

"And if there is any man in the world who can make a success of such a job you most certainly are he!" the major declared in a tone full of conviction.

"My dear fellow, I must thank you for your good opinion, but I certainly think that what you have said is the truth, and not mere idle compliment," the baron remarked, complacently.

"Having made up my mind that Mullett was a gudgeon—a rich fish out of whom I could fry some golden fat—I proceeded to make a careful examination so as to ascertain how I had best proceed."

"Ah, that is like you—always cool and cautious!"

"In the first place there was the daughter; if I could succeed in marrying her I would be made for life, for according to what I can learn about Mullett he is a millionaire with an income of about a hundred thousand dollars a year."

"A prospect like that is almost enough to take a man's breath away!" the major remarked.

"Ah, my dear fellow, but there is a woman in the case," the baron objected. "And long ago I made the discovery that when a petticoat is concerned in an affair it is very apt to be a hard matter to tell how it will turn out."

"Yes, that is true," the major assented. "My own experience has taught me that when a woman is concerned in the game it is apt to be uncertain."

"I might be able to secure the lady, and through her find my way to the strong box of the father, and then I might not, but as I was determined to secure a good slice of his wealth, I conceived the idea of persuading him that he was an extra skillful card-player, finding that he was addicted to a little mild gambling."

"It was a happy thought," the major remarked, approvingly.

"In reality the old man is a fair player, but entirely too cautious—too much afraid of losing—to play a good game."

"You would think that a man who can well afford to lose a thousand dollars at a sitting and never feel it would be apt to play boldly and not be afraid to back his hand when he held good cards and seemed to have a fair chance to win."

"Ah, yes; but I understand just how it is," the other declared.

"I have met just such men. I will bet a goodly amount that the old fellow spent all his early days in poverty, and he got so used to looking after every copper that the habit has become a second nature to him," the major suggested.

"Yes, your supposition is undoubtedly correct," the baron asserted.

"Now, then, as soon as I come to the conclusion that I do not stand any chance to get the girl—for it may be possible, you know, that I will not be able to entrap her, although I think I can—I will get the old man into a game some night and lead him on so that almost before he knows it we will be playing for high stakes; then, when the opportunity occurs, I will make a grand coup and take five or six thousand dollars out of him!"

"The scheme is a delightful one," the major exclaimed, in admiration.

"It is not bad, I fancy," the baron remarked, with an air of satisfaction.

"But I still have another string to my bow," he continued.

"Supposing that I cannot succeed in making either of these schemes work—supposing that the maid is deaf to my suit and I cannot induce the old man to risk a large bet—then come in the tools whom I have managed to introduce into the Mullett household, and we will try a neat, little job of house-breaking, so you see, by hook or by crook, we will have the handling of some of our dear friend Mullett's money."

The major burst into a loud laugh.

"Aha! if this old donkey of an American had any idea of the pretty little games that you are contriving how astonished he would be!"

"Oh, yes, no doubt, but I intend to arrange the matter so he will not have any suspicion of the truth until the trick is executed, and I have got safely off with his cash!" the baron declared.

"And then forever afterward he will hate all Frenchmen!"

"Ah, well, he will have received a lesson, and he must not object to paying for it."

"It is the old saying, mon brave! experience is a dear school, but fools will not learn in any other."

And then the two laughed loudly as they went on their way.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FRIENDLY STRANGER.

LEAVING the scheming Frenchmen to go on their course we will return to the Live Yankee, as the veteran prospector from the West was fond of being designated.

As he came out of the Park and proceeded down Broadway, he did not notice that he had attracted the attention of two well-dressed, and rather sporting-looking men.

One was a middle-aged, heavily-set man, with a smooth face, and a florid complexion, who looked like a prosperous butcher.

The other was a slight, young man, with a thin face, a hawked nose and keen gray eyes.

A good judge of character would have set him down as belonging to the human bird of prey species at the first glance.

The pair had been coming down the street when Jones came out of the Park and crossed Twenty-third street directly in front of them.

"There is the man now!" the young fellow said, in a cautious tone, nudging his companion and nodding to the Live Yankee.

"He looks like a Westerner," the other remarked.

"Oh, yes, no one who was a judge would ever mistake him for anything else," the young man declared. "He is from Montana, from a place named Spanish Bar, and is heavily interested in a big mine called the Live Yankee; he is the man who discovered it, I believe."

"He looks as if he was well-heeled with wealth," the stout fellow asserted. "But the trouble with these Westerners is that, as a rule, they are as well-heeled with weapons as with money, and when a man tries to get at their wealth, if he should happen to make a blunder the chances are good that he will get shot."

"Yes, that is so, but if we can work the trick I don't doubt that this old coon will pan out extra rich," the young man urged.

"And we are awfully in want of cash just now too."

"You bet!" responded the other, emphatically.

"I have got just the sweetest tip on a dark horse, a thirty to one shot, and if I had a hundred or so to put on the beast between now and Saturday I could win a small farm."

"I think we will risk the go, but from what I have seen of this man I don't believe it would be of any use to try the ordinary bunco game on him, for I think he would be sure to get us dead to rights at the start."

"What is the lay then?"

"Run him into a 'boozing ken' and dose him!" the elderly man replied with a quick air of decision.

"Do you think that game will work?" the young fellow asked.

"I can't see any reason why it will not," the other replied. "All these Westerners are fond of their booze. Whisky is like mother's milk to them out there, you know."

"Oh, yes, they get away with a good deal of bug juice, as the Westerners call it, in the land of the setting sun."

"The odds are big that we can hocus him and get away with his roll."

"As we know his name and where he comes from, also his business, it will not be half as much trouble to tackle him as if we had to go through the whole business."

"That is true; and the danger of his smoking the trick is also lessened," the young man suggested.

"Oh, yes, I will do the hand-shaking act, and as soon as I get him fairly in conversation you must come along."

"What will I be this time?"

"Let me see," observed the other, thoughtfully. "We want something which will be apt to make an impression on this Westerner."

"A newspaper editor will be about the ticket, I think."

"Yes, that ought to work," the young fellow coincided.

"It is not likely that the old fellow has ever had much to do with newspaper men, and he will be apt to think it is a lucky chance for him to see what one is like."

"Yes, yes, I think the idea will be sure to catch him."

"Be careful not to overdo the thing, you know. Don't talk too much," the elderly man warned.

"Many good tricks are spoiled in this world because men don't know enough to keep their mouths shut when they ought to," he continued. "I will be careful."

"The western rancher will suit me, so remember that I am Colonel Jabez Smith, from North Platte, Nebraska."

"All right; and I will call myself Tom Russell."

"That will do, and the last time we met was in Chicago, where I made a bet of the drinks with you on the election, which you lost."

"Exactly; and now I ought to square the thing up."

"That is the talk, and when I ask you where we will go you must say that you don't take any stock in these big Broadway places, where all the money is spent on gim-cracks, but you know a saloon where all the newspaper men go—a little place, run on the English plan, where the best liquors in town are kept, and then you pilot us to Bug McKiver's dive."

"And Bug will understand what is up the moment we come in!" the young fellow declared.

"Oh, yes, Bug is no fool!" the elderly man responded. "You don't have to knock him down with a club to make him understand that somebody is around."

"Well, as everything is understood, suppose

we pitch in and see if we can do the trick!" the young fellow suggested.

"All right; keep your eyes on us, you know, and if you see that he is at all suspicious about swallowing my yarn, come right up and call me by name, for that will be apt to make him think that everything is all O. K."

"I understand, and you can just bet I will do all I can to work the game to the queen's taste."

Then the two parted. The elderly man, Colonel Smith, to give him the name he claimed, crossed to the other side of the street, and then hastened around at a brisk pace so as to get well in advance of the Live Yankee, who was sauntering slowly along, amusing himself by looking in the shop windows, after the fashion of strangers who are not familiar with the sights of the great city.

By this maneuver Colonel Smith was able to get fully a block ahead of the Westerner.

Then he crossed the street again and came up on the same side that the Live Yankee was on, so arranging the matter as to meet him face to face.

"Hello! well, I will be hanged if I expected to see you here!" the confidence man exclaimed in well-affected surprise, greeting the Westerner with outstretched hand.

"How are ye, Jones, and how are all the folks at Spanish Bar? Just pulling the solid stuff out of the Live Yankee as usual, I suppose?"

Now, although Abner Jones was a shrewd, sensible man, yet the stranger played his part so well that he really believed the man was some one whom he had once met.

It was no easy matter for a man who had traveled around as much as the Live Yankee in the wilds of the West to carry in his memory the recollection of every man's face whom he had chanced to encounter, and as the stranger was of a type hundreds of whom are to be met with west of Chicago, it was little wonder when greeted so familiarly by name that he should imagine that the man was an old acquaintance.

"I reckon everybody is well at the Bar," the Live Yankee replied. "But I am not very well posted in regard to the town now, for I haven't been there for over three months."

"But the Live Yankee is still turning out the ducats, I suppose!" the other exclaimed, assuming the bluff and hearty manner peculiar to a certain class of the denizens of the wild and woolly West.

"Oh, yes, the Live Yankee is keeping her end up, I am proud to say," Jones replied, racking his brain to remember where he had met the man.

"It was a mighty lucky strike for you, old man, when you lit on that ar' property!" the other declared.

"Wal, I reckon it was, but, I say, you have got a decided advantage of me, for although you have got me and my name as pat as A. B. C., yet I will be blamed if I can remember yours!"

"Smith—Colonel Jabez Smith of North Platte Nebraska, and I have got just as pretty a ranch there as there is out doors, you kin bet your life!" the confidence man exclaimed, acting the character of the bluff and hearty rancher to the life.

"I met you at Spanish Bar just after you made your big strike, and I can tell you, old man, that you wasn't as well-rigged out then as you are now, haw, haw, haw!" and the speaker laughed as though he thought he had given utterance to the finest kind of a joke.

The prompt explanation given by the stranger completely satisfied the Westerner.

Just after he had made the discovery of the Live Yankee claim Spanish Bar had been over-run by strangers, as is always the case with mining-towns when any rich stakes are made in the neighborhood, so the statement of the stranger that he had met him, the Live Yankee, in Spanish Bar he did not doubt.

Just at this moment confidence man number two made his appearance.

He came along slowly in the rear of Jones, using up time by looking in the shop-windows until he fancied the moment had come for him to play his part.

Now he came down the street in the brisk, impulsive way common to the average New Yorker, who, during business hours, usually rushes ahead as if he hadn't a moment to spare.

"Why, is it possible, Colonel Smith?" he exclaimed, advancing with outstretched hand.

"Sart'nal that is my handle!" replied the other, grasping the young man's hand with the generous warmth peculiar to the men of the West.

"You remember me, I hope?" the young man asked. "Tom Russell, of the Associated Press?"

"Oh, lordy, yes!" Colonel Smith responded. "You are that newspaper chap that I met in Chicago?"

"Yes, I am the man."

"You are the first editor that I ever run across, and I reckon I ain't a-going to forget you in a hurry," Colonel Smith averred.

"Well, I am glad of that," Russell assumed. "It is always pleasant for a man to be able to hold his friends, old and new."

"By the way, let me introduce you to an old western pard of mine," the colonel remarked. "Here's a rustler right from the old Rocky Mountains—one of the sports that get his wealth out of old mother earth!"

"I shall be very glad indeed to make his acquaintance," the young confidence man announced, with a polite bow to the Live Yankee.

"This gentleman is the boss of one of the biggest and richest mines that was ever struck on top of this huge earth!" the colonel declared, giving a capital imitation of the hearty, blustering far-western manner of speech.

"Yes, sir, you can bet high on that!" the confidence man continued. "My pard hyer, I reckon, pulls just as much of the old, solid stuff out of the earth in a year as any man on top of this old footstool. Ain't that about right, Jones?"

"Wal, I reckon my mine does about as well as the most of them," the Westerner admitted.

Be it observed in passing that the Live Yankee was no fool; on the contrary he was a man of more than average sharpness; but these two confidence men were such expert rogues—such perfect masters of their art—the science of deception—that Jones had no suspicion they were anything but what they represented themselves to be.

"It does me proud to introduce this hyer old Western pard to you, because I know you are one of the right sort—a man whom it is safe to tie to, every time!" the colonel averred.

"Oh, come now, you are laying it on entirely too thick!" the pretended newspaper man protested.

"Not a mite, I declare to goodness!" the other rejoined.

"Mr. Jones, let me introduce you to Mr. Tom Russell, a particular friend of mine."

The confidence man shook hands with the Live Yankee, and expressed the deep delight which it gave him to make the acquaintance of any friend of a man when he esteemed so highly as he did Colonel Smith.

The Live Yankee responded in suitable terms, and, in reality, he was pleased to meet the pair, for they had conducted the business so well as to give him the impression that they were desirable acquaintances.

"By the way, gentlemen, las talking is dry work, suppose we go in and moisten our throats with a little liquid poison," Russell suggested, in a jocular manner.

"Well, I don't know about that," the colonel replied, immediately, with a shake of the head.

"What is the matter?" the pretended editor exclaimed, assuming to be surprised.

"I have kinder sworn off for a while," the other explained.

"Is that so?" Russell exclaimed.

"Well, really now I am surprised," he continued. "For you are about the last man in the world whom I would have thought of doing such a thing."

"The fact is, I was afraid I was getting a little too fond of the bug-juice," the colonel remarked.

"Ah, yes, I see, and thought you had better call a halt for a while," Russell suggested.

"Yes, you have hit it," the colonel replied. "I wasn't very well and my doctor allowed that, maybe, it was the whisky which was putting my stomach out of order, and said it would be just as well for me to go slow for a while."

"Under the circumstances then I do not wonder that you are a little shy of the poison," Russell declared.

"I would like to take a nip with you right well though, and I don't suppose a couple of hists would be apt to do me any harm," Smith remarked in a hesitating way.

"You needn't take whisky," the other suggested. "I know an English chop-house, which is on one of the side streets running from Broadway, where we can get a glass of prime old English ale, and I would suggest that we go there."

"I am agreeable!" the colonel exclaimed, immediately.

"How does it strike you, Mr. Jones?"

"Oh, I am with you!" the Live Yankee replied.

"Come along, then!" the newspaper man urged.

"It isn't a very imposing-looking saloon," Russell explained, as the three turned from Broadway into the side street. "On the contrary, it is a rather dingy-looking shebang, but these Englishmen don't go much on style, anyway, and the old fellow who keeps this place is a peculiar, odd character."

"Well, as long as the liquor is good, I don't care a continental for the looks of the shanty where it is sold, hey, Jones?" the colonel exclaimed.

"The fire-water is the thing, and not the building," the Live Yankee replied.

The English chop-house was only a couple of blocks from Broadway, and so the three soon reached it.

As the pretended newspaper man had said, the saloon was indeed a dingy, unattractive place.

It was located on a corner in one of the old-

fashioned, wooden, two-storied houses, a good hundred years old, which are still to be found here and there in the metropolis.

But although the confidence man had called the place an English chop-house, it was not so in reality, being nothing more than the ordinary corner saloon, but he thought when he extended the invitation that English chop-house sounded better, and then he had the idea the stranger did not know enough about the great city to discover that the saloon was not as he represented.

In reality the saloon was nothing more or less than a house of call for crooks of all degrees.

The proprietor, Henry Hammers, as he called himself, was a middle-aged, bull-necked, bull-headed Englishman, who had the reputation of being a particularly quarrelsome and only customer, especially if he had been drinking, and the police of the neighborhood gave him a very bad name.

The proprietor was behind the bar when the three entered, and as the two confidence men were old acquaintances he immediately jumped to the conclusion, when he saw the stranger, that there was a game on foot.

The old Englishman was just the man to help along anything of the sort, and so he gave the new-comer a warm welcome.

"We are going to try a little of your famous old English ale," Russell remarked.

"Ah, yes; well, gents, I can recommend it for it is a prime article," the saloon-keeper declared.

"You can't get such ale in this country, you know, for you haven't got the hops 'ere," he continued.

"But go into the back room where you can sit down and take your ale in a comfortable manner," the Englishman urged.

"That isn't a bad idea," Russell observed. "Eb, gentlemen?"

"Oh, yes, we might as well take it easy," the colonel remarked.

"Certainly that is correct," the Live Yankee coincided.

Then the three went into the small room in the rear of the saloon while the old Englishman proceeded to draw the ale.

There were three round tables in the apartment, and Russell advanced to the one in the center, upon which was a pack of cards.

"This one will do I think, so sit down, gentlemen, and make yourselves comfortable," the confidence man exclaimed.

The three sat themselves and Russell took up the cards.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LITTLE GAME.

"SEEING these cards here reminds me of a fellow that I met at Coney Island last summer who was about as smart at cards as any man I ever ran across," Russell remarked, shuffling the "pasteboards" in a clumsy way as he spoke.

"Now, although I have played cards all my life, and both won and lost a good bit of money with the boys at poker, yet I never could do any tricks," he continued.

"In fact, my fingers are all thumbs as far as cards are concerned," he added.

"Very much the same way with me," the colonel observed.

"Of course, in my time I have done my share of poker playing," he confessed. "But I never was clever at handling the 'papers,' as the sports call them."

"Are you an expert, Mr. Jones?" Russell asked.

"I presume you are thought," he continued, before the Live Yankee could reply.

"All you fellows can generally give the rest of mankind a good lesson when it comes to cards, and then leave them all to pieces."

"You have got hold of the wrong man to talk to about cards when you tackle me on the subject," Jones responded. "For, really, I don't know anything about them, and I never played a game in my life."

"Is that possible?" Russell exclaimed, and the colonel also expressed his wonder.

"It is a fact!" the Live Yankee declared. "You see, I was brought up by a father and mother who thought that cards were the devil's picture-book, and it was their notion that any boy who was foolish enough to touch a card was on the straight road to the bottomless pit."

"Oh, yes, that was the old-fashioned notion," Russell coincided. "My parents were quite liberal in their views, but I had some relatives who looked upon cards with a holy horror."

"Just the same way with me," the colonel assented. "My own particular people didn't object to cards, but some of my uncles and aunts reckoned I would be hung if I didn't quit touching the things."

"That was about the way a good many of my folks looked at the matter," Russell remarked.

"And there isn't any doubt too that cards have played the mischief with a good many men," the young confidence man continued. "But if a fellow has got any common sense, and plays just for amusement, and to pass the time

away, you know, he is not apt to come to any harm."

"Yes, that is my idea," the colonel observed. "Cards have enabled me to pass many a dull hour away, and I am sure I am none the worse for it."

"I do not doubt that," Jones remarked. "But, somehow, I never took a notion to cards; there is not much sporting blood in me, anyway, I reckon, for I never bet a cent on anything in my life."

The conversation at this point was interrupted by the Englishman bringing in the ale.

"Well, gentlemen, here's to our better acquaintance!" Russell exclaimed.

The others bowed their acknowledgments, and then all took a hearty draught of the sparkling beverage.

It was good ale as the three unanimously declared.

And then Russell proceeded to show the cunning trick which the Coney Island fakir had performed with the cards.

It was the old three-card monte game. The colonel pretended to be greatly interested, and declared that he could pick out the right card every time.

"Oh, yes, I know that it looks as if you could," the other admitted. "And, possibly, you can do it too, for I am clumsy in doing the trick, but if that Coney Island chap was handling the cards I would be willing to bet a small fortune that you couldn't!"

"Go ahead and let me try!" the colonel exclaimed, apparently very eager to make the effort.

And then the game commenced. The confidence man was in reality one of the cleverest three-card monte operators in the country, but it was his design now to appear to be only a clumsy beginner.

For ten minutes Russell "threw" the cards and the colonel tried to pick out the right one, and he succeeded about as often as he failed.

It was the design of the two sharpers to get the Western interested so as to induce him to bet, but all their artful tricks were in vain.

Not that the Live Yankee had any suspicions that his companions were trying to play any trick upon him, for they managed the affair so skillfully that his apprehensions were not aroused, but, as he said, he did not take any interest in card games and so could not be induced to take a part.

When the ale was drunk the colonel insisted upon standing treat, and when he gave the order for a fresh supply he gave it in such a way that the saloon-keeper comprehended that one of the glasses was to be drugged, so the Western could be made a victim.

Only one man had come into the place since the arrival of the three, so the proprietor had been able to keep his eyes upon the party, and therefore understood just how matters were progressing.

He comprehended that the pair were endeavoring to rope the stranger into a three card monte game, and when he saw that they were not successful in their efforts to get the destined victim to wager any money he anticipated that they would try the dosing trick, so was not surprised when the colonel gave him the signal to prepare the "loaded" ale.

The presence of the military stranger, who had come in for a glass of beer, did not bother the saloon-keeper at all, for long experience had taught him to arrange the matters so that it would be difficult for any outsider to detect that there was anything wrong.

And then, too, the Englishman had taken care to make a close examination of the man in order to discover whether he would be likely to be sharp enough to see that some game was going on.

The stranger was a big, muscularly built fellow of forty or thereabouts, with a rather dull, stolid looking face, smoothly shaven, and fringed with yellow hair; a German, apparently, with the appearance of a well-paid workman.

And after the Englishman completed his examination he came to the conclusion that the stranger was not a man who would be likely to interfere in a matter which did not concern him, even if he thought that everything was not all right.

So feeling easy in his mind the saloon-keeper infused the necessary drug in one of the three glasses of ale which he had drawn, and carrying the drinks into the private room, was particular to set the drugged glass in front of the Live Yankee.

Russell had given up his three-card monte business as soon as the second round of ale was ordered, and had begun a game of solitaire, which was new to Jones, so he became interested in it, the confidence man taking pains to explain all about it at length so as to keep the other occupied.

"Well, here's luck to all of us!" the colonel exclaimed, taking up his glass of ale as he spoke.

"That is a very good toast, and I hope you speak with the voice of a prophet!" Russell rejoined.

"Yes, I hope so!" and all took a good drink of ale.

"That is really about the best ale I ever drank!" Russell averred, smacking his lips heartily over the draught.

"Drink it up, gentlemen, then we will have another, and I must be off, as I am obliged to meet a man in Wall street about some important business in half an hour," he announced.

"It will have to be on me this time, gentleman, I reckon," the Live Yankee remarked as he drained his glass.

"Three more ales, please!" Russell ordered.

The saloon-keeper hastened to draw the beverage.

By this time the stranger at the bar had finished his beer. He had taken a long time over it, after the German fashion, instead of swallowing it down at a gulp, and the saloon-keeper was in hopes that, as he had finished his drink, he would depart, for he considered that it would be just as well not to have a witness in the place, although he had made up his mind to close the door of the private room in a careless manner after he served the ale.

But the outsider betrayed no indications of anything of the kind; on the contrary, he was hunting in his pockets, apparently in search of another nickel.

The Englishman carried the ale into the inner room.

Brief as had been the interval, the potent drug had begun to produce its effect on the Live Yankee. He leaned back in his chair, his head drooped upon his breast, while his eyes assumed a glassy expression.

The "load" which these New York thugs use in their nefarious practice is so powerful that it produces insensibility in a few moments; yet it is so tasteless and colorless that it can be administered in almost any kind of liquor without the suspicions of the drinker being excited.

"He's gone!" the saloon-keeper remarked with a sly chuckle, speaking low so his words would not reach the ears of the stranger in the saloon.

"Ch, yes; there is more than one way to kill a cat, you know," Russell replied, in the same cautious tone.

"He was too fly for three-card monte, but we have got him dead to rights now!" said the colonel.

"It takes you two chaps to work the oracle to the Queen's taste!" the Englishman averred, as he retreated, carelessly swinging the door shut as he came out of the room.

"Give me another beer," the stranger ordered, as the saloon-keeper went behind the counter; and as the Englishman proceeded to draw the drink, the outsider turned abruptly and walked toward the inner room, much to the surprise and disgust of the saloon-keeper.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN INTERFERENCE.

"HERE, you! don't go in there!" the saloon-keeper exclaimed, irately.

"Why not? I've as good a right as those other fellows!" the man replied in an ugly way, pushing the door open as he spoke.

The two confidence men were just about to relieve their victim of his valuables as the new-comer approached the door, but his voice warned them that they were to be interrupted, and so they hastily resumed their chairs.

The stranger marched into the room, nodded to the two in the most familiar manner and said:

"The barkeeper had an idea he could keep me out, but he hasn't had the honor of being introduced to a fellow about my size or he wouldn't try any game of the kind."

The confidence men glanced at the man, and Russell exclaimed:

"See here, my friend, this is a little private party, and it is my idea that it is a clumsy thing for you to force yourself in here where you are not wanted."

"Yes, that is my opinion, too!" the colonel supplemented.

"We don't know you, and we don't want to know you, and the quicker you get out of here, the better we will like it!" he continued.

The man had pushed open the door and advanced into the little room, yet standing where he could keep his eyes on the saloon-keeper, as if anticipating an attack in the rear.

Nor had he made any mistake in thinking that the Englishman would resent his intrusion, for as quickly as possible Hammers seized the heavy hammer-like club known as a bung-starter, ever the saloon-keeper's favorite weapon, rushed from behind the bar and advanced in pursuit of the stranger.

"Come out of there now!" the dispenser cried, angrily. "Get right out of this place, or I will break your thick head for you!" brandishing the heavy bung-starter.

The stranger retreated quickly from the doorway, and got into a corner of the room, so that he had both the confidence men and the saloon-keeper in his front, and as he performed this maneuver, he drew a revolver from his pocket.

"Go slow, now, Hammers, or I shall be obliged to cheat the hangman of a job by boring a hole through you!" was the warning he gave.

All three of the men were taken completely by surprise, and, for the moment, were at their wits' end how to proceed.

Attacking an unarmed man, and facing a fellow provided with a six-shooter, are two entirely different things, and it is no wonder the three were perplexed.

"See here! you had better put up that pistol or you will find yourself in a peck of trouble!" the colonel blustered. "It is against the law to carry concealed weapons in this city, and if the police get hold of you they will put you through a course of sprouts."

"Yes, you put up that pistol and get right out of here, or I will send for a policeman right away!" the saloon-keeper threatened.

"You are a nice lot of fellows to talk about sending for a policeman," the stranger exclaimed. "Suppose a policeman should come, what explanation will you give him in regard to that man there?" And the speaker pointed to the Westerner, who by this time had become completely senseless.

The confederates both showed alarm, for this speech indicated that the stranger had a knowledge of the drug game they had played.

"There isn't anything the matter with him excepting that he has got a little too much liquor on board, and it has made him sleepy," the colonel explained.

"I know better than that," the stranger retorted. "He has not drank enough to throw him into this insensible state. I know the game. You have drugged the man so that you can rob him."

Caught at their villainy by the daring spotter, the rascals fairly started from their seats, as if to either run away or to make a leap upon the unwelcome visitor.

"Just by accident I saw you two fellows crossing Broadway with this man, and as I suspected you intended to clean him out, I decided to take a hand in the game."

The baffled scoundrels were astounded. Was this daring intruder a headquarters detective in disguise?

"Who in blazes are you?" the Englishman exclaimed in his sudden anger, handling his ugly weapon menacingly.

"The Unknown is a good name for me about this time," the intruder replied, with a grim smile.

"You are not a detective, for I know every man of them!" the colonel declared.

"I am a good enough detective for you this time," was the retort. "I have succeeded in spoiling your villainous game, and the best detective in the land couldn't do more."

"If I had chosen to wait a few moments longer before entering I could have caught you dead to rights, but there are certain reasons why I am not anxious to jug you two just at present, so I contented myself with keeping your hands out of the man's pockets."

The three scoundrels were in a quandary.

It was a terrible blow to have their victim snatched from their grasp just at the moment when it seemed impossible for their plans to fail.

And although, as a rule, confidence men of their stamp are averse to fighting, yet on the present occasion they were so exasperated that they would have shown fight, had not the stranger, revolver in hand, so decidedly the best of the situation.

The Englishman "weakened," to use the cant term, the worst of the three, for he had more to lose than the others.

He knew that the police looked upon his saloon with a suspicious eye and was, therefore, very anxious to avoid trouble or exposure—which the intruder well understood, for he hastened to call out commandingly:

"Now then, I want you two fellows to get out!"

"I might run you in, and as you have been warned not to attempt to do any business in New York, any of the judges would be apt to be pretty hard with you, but, as I said, I have my reasons for not wishing to bother with the matter just now, so I will give you a chance to get off; and I will not lay this matter up against you either, Hammers, if you are inclined to be reasonable and not ugly."

The confidence men saw that the stranger was in earnest, and as he possessed all the advantages they came to the conclusion to do as he said; in fact, there wasn't any other course open to them.

"Well, boss, I reckon it is your game this time," the colonel remarked, endeavoring to put the best possible face upon the matter.

"Yes, you hold the winning hand, and we will draw out," Russell added, with the air of a philosopher.

"Better luck next time, maybe," the colonel suggested.

And then the pair of rascals took their departure.

The saloon-keeper retreated behind the bar and put away his bung-starter.

The stranger went to the door, hailed a boy and instructed him to call a carriage.

The lad, inspired by the desire to gain a "quarter," soon found a cab.

"My friend here is a little under the weather," the stranger explained to the cab-driver,

as he took the helpless man in his strong arms and put him in the cab.

The driver grinned, as though he considered it a good joke for a man to get so drunk as to be incapable of moving.

The rescuer of the Yankee, giving the driver an address, entered the cab.

Twenty minutes later the vehicle halted at the tenement-house where Joe Phenix had his rooms.

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER CLUE.

As the reader has probably surmised, the big stranger, who had interfered to spoil the game of the confidence men, was the veteran Joe Phenix.

And the reason why he did not wish to appear and prosecute the bunco sharps was because all the associated rascals of the city, big and little, believed that he was dead.

Although no word of mention in regard to the affair had got into the newspapers, yet by that mysterious system of communication which exists among the criminal classes the full particulars of the fight on the pier, as reported by Crickley, and the Bandy-legged Rangers, had been passed from man to man.

The indefatigable bloodhound, the untiring man-hunter, the thief-taker who was more dreaded by the men who lived by defying the laws than any human hunter of the detective force, had been decoyed to a lonely pier and there given his ticket for another world.

At first the rascals of the metropolis were almost inclined to believe the news was too good to be true, but then there was not only Crickley's statement, but the confirming stories of the members of the Hay Gang, who had lurked in the neighborhood for the express purpose of "gitting a crack," as they expressed it, at the bloodhound who had brought so many of their friends to grief.

None of the members of the criminal class were shrewd enough to suspect that the acute detective was playing possum.

That he had caused a false report of his death to be spread abroad, so that he might the more easily trap his game, rendered less cautious by the thought that the untiring bloodhound had at last gone to his long home.

It was important that Joe Phenix should not be known to be in the land of the living until the time came for him to spring the trap which he was preparing so carefully.

So he was obliged to content himself with scaring away the bunco men instead of capturing them.

Assisted by the cabman, Joe Phenix carried the senseless Westerner into his front apartment, then paid the man and dismissed him.

The room was plainly furnished, but there was an old-fashioned lounge, and upon this the detective placed the Live Yankee.

"They must have given him a pretty stiff dose, or else it would not have operated so quickly, or have rendered him so completely insensible," the detective mused as he took a chair and sat down to wait for the man to return to consciousness.

As it happened, the detective's time was his own, as he had no affair on hand which required his attention, so he was able to wait for the Westerner to recover.

It was a good hour before Jones showed any signs of life, but as soon as he began to recover, consciousness came back rapidly to him.

He opened his eyes and gazed vacantly around him for a few moments, then he rose slowly to a sitting posture, leaned his back against the wall, and heaved a deep sigh.

"How do you feel now?" the veteran detective asked.

"Well, I have a frightful headache," the Westerner answered, slowly, looking around him in a vacant way.

"And I say, how comes it that I am in this place?" he continued, very much bewildered.

"What has happened to me, anyway?"

"What is the last thing that you remember?" the detective asked, abruptly.

"Let me see," the Live Yankee observed, reflectively.

"I met with an old acquaintance from the West, he introduced me to a friend of his, and nice, agreeable fellows both of them were too; then we went to a saloon where we had some extra good ale, and the newspaper man did some funny tricks with cards and then—well, I suppose the ale must have got in 'o my head and put me to sleep for I will be hanged if I can remember anything more."

"Have you ever heard of the bunco game?" Joe Phenix asked.

By this time Jones had recovered the full possession of his senses, although tormented by a fearful headache, and the simple question opened his eyes at once.

"You don't mean to say that those two agreeable fellows were a couple of bunco men?" he exclaimed in profound astonishment.

"Yes, that statement is correct; the pair are a couple of the most expert confidence operators in the country."

"But they did not play the game in the way

that I have always seen it described in the newspapers," the Live Yankee urged.

"Because they took your measure so accurately as to be sure that they could not catch you with the old trick," the veteran detective explained.

"They did try the three-card monte game on you, and when they found you were not inclined to bet, they had your ale drugged, and if I had not happened to be near at hand to take a part in the affair you would, undoubtedly, have been robbed of all your valuables," Joe Phenix continued.

The Westerner clapped his hand on his watch, and after having ascertained that it, and his heavy gold chain were safe, thrust his hand into the breast pocket of his coat and produced a big wallet, literally stuffed with bills.

"Thank goodness! it is all safe!" he exclaimed after making a hasty examination of the contents of the wallet.

"The rascals would have got a prize if they had cleaned me out, for I have over five hundred dollars in my sheepskin here," the Westerner continued, returning the wallet to its place with a sigh of relief as he finished the speech.

"You are to be congratulated upon your escape then."

"But you are the man who pulled me through, and I don't exactly understand why you should have taken the trouble unless you are a detective officer," the Live Yankee remarked.

"You have hit upon the truth," Joe Phenix replied.

"I am a detective, but not in the police line, although I used to be; hence it follows that I know about the prominent rascals who make New York their headquarters, and when I saw you on Broadway in company with these two bunco sharps I suspected immediately that they had picked you out for a victim."

"By jink! it was a lucky thing for me that you happened to notice us for the fellows would undoubtedly have skinned me as clean as a whistle!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"Yes, it must be admitted that they did the work in an artistic manner; but then in their peculiar line the pair stand at the head of their profession," the veteran detective observed.

"Well, I tell you now, stranger, I am ever so much obliged to you!" the Live Yankee exclaimed.

"But, I say, what did you do with the scamps—jail 'em?" he asked.

"No, unfortunately I am so situated that I am obliged to keep in the background as I am working up a little game, and so I had to allow the rascals to get away for it would interfere materially with my plans for me to appear openly in court as a prosecutor."

"Yes, I see—I comprehend just how you are situated," the Live Yankee observed, slowly.

"And I reckon too that I ain't sorry that you didn't have the scamps up, for I would have had to appear as a witness against them, and then as the darned newspapers would have printed an account of the affair everybody would know just how big a flat I was to allow two sharps of this kind to take me into camp without any trouble."

"Yes, the newspapers would be certain to publish a full account of the affair," the detective coincided.

"And probably, shove my picture in too, dod-rot 'em!" Jones exclaimed.

"Mebbe give a sketch of my life, and run in a lot of other trash, for these newspaper men are up to all sorts of games nowadays."

"Very likely."

"And all my acquaintances would have had an extra good time in poking fun at me!" the Yankee said with a grimace.

"And what makes it a blame sight worse, you understand, is that I have always been considered to be an extra sharp fellow, and the idea that a couple of these New York scamps could pick me up with no more trouble than if I was the biggest tenderfoot that ever struck the town is a mighty sore point with me."

"You are not the first sharp, wide-awake man that has been buncoed by fellows of this kind," the veteran detective observed.

"That isn't much consolation, although I suppose it ought to be," the Westerner observed with another grimace.

"But I tell you, stranger, I am mighty glad that the thing will not get into the newspapers for there is a certain man in this town, who is interested with me in a mine out in Montana, who would be delighted to get a chance to poke a little fun at me."

"One of the kind of fellows, you understand, who prides himself upon being uncommonly sharp, and yet, in reality, he hardly knows enough to go in when it rains, although he is now aiming to cut the biggest kind of a shine in New York, and tries, too, for to get everybody to call him Jonathan Mullett, esquire."

Joe Phenix looked surprised.

"Do you mean the Jonathan Mullett who has apartments in the Alhambra, on Broadway?" he asked.

"That very identical customer! Do you know him?" Jones questioned.

"Oh, yes; but not intimately."

"Well, I know him from A to Ampersand," the other declared.

The thought occurred to the veteran detective that it was strange how twice now, through the agency of entire strangers, his attention had been called to the Montana man.

"It really looks as if fate intended that I should interest myself in his affairs," the detective muttered to himself.

"Yes, sir, there isn't a man on top of this hyer footstool who can post you any better in regard to Jonathan Mullett than a fellow of about my size," the Live Yankee continued.

"I knew him when he first came to Spanish Bar and opened a little general store there," Jones explained.

"And then arter he found there wasn't much money in that, his wife pitched in to help him out by taking boarders; and there ain't any discount on the woman, too, although the man ain't up to par by a jugful!"

"I believe, though, he is trying to become quite a great man in New York here now?" the veteran detective observed, with the idea of leading the other on.

"Oh, yes, he is trying to make out that he is one of the biggest toads in the puddle!" the westerner replied.

"He is making a good thing out of the mine in which we are both interested, but he doesn't get anywhere near the money he pretends to receive," Jones asserted.

"But he wishes to pose as a millionaire."

"Oh, yes; and he has a crazy idea in his head that he is descended from a noble French family, and he talks about going to France to claim an estate and a title which he says are waiting for him there."

"What do you suppose put such an idea as that into his head?" the detective asked, musingly.

"Oh, I don't know; it is pretty hard to tell where he got such a notion," the Live Yankee responded with a shake of the head.

"I do not see much of Mullett, for this foolishness of his makes me sick, so I am not as well qualified to judge as I might be, but I have a sort of an idea that some foreigners whom he has got to going with have put the notion into his head."

Joe Phenix became immediately interested.

"Some foreigners, eh?"

"Yes, there is one fellow in particular, a French baron, St. Germaine, as he calls himself, who is awful thick with Mullett, and I have an idea that he is the man who is responsible for Mullett's having the notion."

"I fancy from the way in which you speak that you are not particularly impressed with this St. Germaine," Joe Phenix observed in his shrewd way.

"No, I ain't!" the Westerner responded, bluntly.

"What is the matter with the man?"

"Oh, I don't know," Jones responded. "I can't say that there is much of anything the matter, only he is too soft to please me—too mighty anxious to be agreeable, you understand—and although Mullett is mightily tickled by the idea that he is hand and glove with a real, live nobleman, I don't take any stock in it at all."

"The Frenchman evidently has some purpose in view, or else he would not be anxious to cultivate Mullett's acquaintance."

"Oh, yes; I reckon he is on the make."

"Do you think he is a genuine French nobleman, or only an adventurer masquerading as one?" the veteran detective asked.

"Well, now, you have got me!" the Live Yankee declared.

"To tell you the honest truth I never thought at all about the matter," he continued. "But now you come to speak about it I must say that I should not be surprised if the man did turn out to be a scamp."

"Mullett, of course, firmly believes that the man is what he represents himself to be," Joe Phenix observed.

"You bet!" the Westerner declared. "The fellow has obtained a mighty big influence over him, and from the way he talks you would believe that the Frenchman was a regular old king-pin."

"Why, would you believe it? he has got old Mullett into gambling!"

"Is that possible?"

"Yes, and the joke of the thing is that the fellow has worked the game in such a way that Mullett believes he is a great sport, and, honestly, between you and me and the bed post, the old galoot hasn't got an ounce of sporting blood in his veins."

"Well, from what little I know of him I should not imagine he was built that way," Joe Phenix observed.

"He ain't, but, somehow, this pesky Frenchman has managed to put the devil into him," the Westerner explained.

"He has got the notion into his head that all the big-bugs gamble more or less," the Live Yankee continued. "And so if he expects to make people believe that he is away up at the top of the heap he must gamble too."

"I see, he has got the idea that it is one of the attributes of a fine gentleman."

"That is it! That is the p'int!"

"And the Frenchman is probably feathering

his nest nicely by winning Mullett's money," the veteran detective observed.

"No, he ain't, and that is where the joke comes in!" Jones exclaimed. "It is Mullett who is winning the Frenchman's money!"

"Is it possible?"

"That is what Mullett says, and I have always found him to be very truthful," Jones replied.

"The only boasting I have ever known him to do was about how much money he makes—his income, as he calls it in his high-strung way," the Westerner continued.

"And then you understand he never tried anything of the kind on me," the Live Yankee declared, in conclusion.

"It certainly seems very strange that a man of the Mullett stamp should be able to win money at cards from such a fellow as I imagine this baron must be," the veteran detective remarked, in a reflective way.

"Well, that is the old man's say-so, and he chuckles a good deal over the thing, too," the Live Yankee observed.

"He thinks that it is quite a feather in his cap, you understand. He does not pretend, you know, that he skins the Frenchman out of his life, for, as he puts it in his ridiculous way, they only play for enough money to make it interesting."

"The probable explanation is that the Frenchman is playing a deep game," Joe Phenix observed, after thinking over the matter for a moment.

"He is leading Mullett on, and allowing him to win small sums now, so as to get a chance to take a big stake out of him at some future time."

"By gum! I reckon you have hit it!" the Westerner exclaimed. "I didn't think of a dodge of that kind."

"It is a very old trick, and is usually successful if the men who are working it are careful how they manage the matter," the veteran detective remarked.

"And now you can do me a service if you will," Joe Phenix said, abruptly.

"You can just bet I will be glad to do it," the Westerner declared. "You saved me from getting cleaned out by those scamps, and I will do anything I can for you, for you can bet your life that Abner Jones—that is me, you know—is not the kind of a rooster to go back on any man who has done him a service."

"It is my impression that this French baron is a rascal. I do not believe that he is a nobleman at all, but a first-class fraud; in fact, that he is the captain of a desperate gang of outlaws who are banded together for the purpose of plundering men who have wealth to lose, and as I am anxious to break up the gang, I will be glad of a chance to get at them."

"I should not be surprised if you had made a right smart guess at the truth," the Westerner observed. "And you can bet your bottom dollar that I will do all I can to help you!"

"And, I say, if this hyer thing turns out to be true, you will be doing Mullett a mighty big service if you succeed in upsetting the schemes of the gang, for if the game went through, the fellows would skin the old man in an awful way."

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that," the veteran detective assented. "The scamps are first-class rascals, men who always go in for a big game."

"This baron has fooled Mullett completely if he isn't a French nobleman, for the old man swears by him, and, really, I believe he would be glad to have the man marry his daughter, if he could only get the girl to consent."

"And isn't she willing?"

"Oh, no; she has taken a fancy to another man."

And then Jones related all the particulars of the love affair between Pauline Mullett and Jerry Shelstone, taking care to explain, too, how he had deemed it necessary to interfere in the matter.

Joe Phenix listened attentively and made a memorandum in regard to young Shelstone.

"This is an important bit of information," he said when the Westerner concluded the recital. "For, if I am correct in my suspicion that this so-called French baron is at the head of an organized gang of scoundrels who have made up their minds to make Mullett a victim, it is certain that if there is a chance for one of their number to marry Miss Mullett you can depend upon their doing all in their power to bring about such a result, for it would be a wonderful windfall to them."

"I feel pretty sure, from what I know of the matter, that old Mullett would think it was a good thing, but the gal will never consent, for she thinks too much of young Shelstone," Jones observed.

"If the leaders of this gang are as shrewd and determined men as I suspect them to be, when they find that the young man stands in their way, the odds are great that they will not hesitate to strike a blow at him in order to break the match off," the veteran detective asserted.

The Westerner looked surprised.

"You don't mean it?" he questioned. "You

don't really think that the scamps would go as far as that, do you?"

"Oh, yes, they are playing for a big stake, and they are not the men I take them to be if they allow a little matter like that to stand in their way."

Jones reflected over the matter for a few moments.

"By gum! I reckon you are right!" he declared, at last.

"Fellows of their kidney wouldn't be apt to hesitate at much of anything, so long as it would help their game along."

"I will call upon Shelstone and give him a warning, so that he will be on the lookout for danger," said Joe Phenix. "If he is prepared for an attack, it will be a difficult matter for the scoundrels to get at him."

"Very true."

"And now I will assume a disguise, and you must introduce me to Mullett, and as he is fond of noblemen, I will get myself up as a Russian count for his benefit."

"That will answer first-rate!" Jones declared. "You can bet your life that he will be glad to know you!"

"Then it was arranged that the detective, disguised as a Russian, should take up his quarters at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and in due time be introduced to Mullett, and this ended the interview."

CHAPTER XXI.

GATHERING UP THE THREADS.

JOE PHENIX and Jones proceeded to Broadway where they loaded a car in company and they rode up-town.

At the Fifth Avenue Hotel the Westerner got out, but the disguised detective kept on until the Alhambra flats were reached, then he alighted.

It was his purpose to see the girl whom he had rescued from a watery grave.

He inquired for Miss Bessie Murray, explaining that he was her uncle, Toby Johnson.

It was the butler, Daniel Crickley, who received him, and after he was escorted to the dining-room where he was instructed to wait until the girl could be summoned, as there was no one around, the disguised detective judged that it was a favorable opportunity to say a few words to the ex-convict.

"You don't recognize me, eh, Crickley?" Joe Phenix asked.

"The butler started in surprise, and then he came close to the disguised detective and took a good look at him."

"Upon my word, Mr. Phenix, your disguise is perfect!" the man exclaimed in admiration.

"Well, I think it will pass muster," the man-hunter remarked.

"How are things going? And, by the way, is it safe to speak here?" the veteran detective asked with a cautious glance around.

"Yes, for as it happens, there are only myself, the footman, who is a stupid lout of a boy, and Bessie, at home."

"That is good, for it will give you an opportunity to explain to me how things are going," the thief-taker observed, helping himself to a chair.

The other followed his example, sat silent and thoughtful for a few moments, and then said abruptly:

"I know that it isn't any of my business, but it isn't possible, is it, that this girl, Bessie, is one of your spies? Because, if she is, then all I have to say is, that I never met so deep a girl in all my life!"

Joe Phenix smiled and shook his head.

"No, the girl is no spy of mine," he replied.

"She is a simple, innocent creature and not the kind to be serviceable in any such capacity."

And then he related how he had happened to make the girl's acquaintance.

"That French woman is a bad egg!" Crickley exclaimed. "And it was her game to get the girl out of the house."

"So I surmised, but for what reason?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Because she is jealous of her influence with the young lady, Miss Pauline."

"Ah, yes, I comprehend."

"Miss Pauline has taken a great fancy to Bessie, and Mrs. Mullett also likes her, and the French woman fears that in time the girl may supplant her, for although she has done her best to produce a favorable impression upon the ladies, and in reality she is a first-class lady's maid, yet neither one of the ladies seem to care for her."

"Is the French woman crooked?" the disguised detective asked.

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that," Crickley replied. "When I had my interview with the chiefs of the gang, who got me my position here, I was told by them that when I received a certain signal I was to look upon the party giving it as a pal, and, furthermore, I was to obey any orders that I might receive from such a person."

"I understand."

"The signal was 'Which do you like best, black or white?'"

"A significant sentence, and one easily remembered," the veteran detective observed.

"I had not been two days in the house before the Frenchwoman gave me the signal."

"And have you had any conversation with her?"

"No, nothing to amount to anything. After she gave the signal I responded, 'All right,' and then she said, 'You seem to be a good man, and if you do the work which will be assigned to you in good style you will profit by it.'"

"I replied that I would do the best I could, and then she warned me to be careful to keep my eyes open and not to miss any opportunity to keep myself informed in regard to the ways of the family."

"The woman is evidently an old hand and understands what she is about," Joe Phenix observed.

"Oh, yes, she is a deep one. There isn't any mistake about that."

"Well, how does the land lay?" the veteran detective asked. "Is there any chance for the gang to make a big stake?"

"No, I don't think there is as far as I can make out," Crickley replied. "The old gentleman has got a few diamonds, and the ladies have some also, but not to amount to anything, and although there is a parlor safe in old Mullett's bedroom yet it is my impression that he doesn't keep many valuables in it."

"It isn't stuffed with bonds and bank-bills then," Joe Phenix remarked with a smile.

"Oh, no, the old fellow isn't the kind of man to keep things of that kind in the house."

"Well, remain on the watch and advise me as soon as anything turns up, the veteran detective warned.

Crickley promised that he would do so, and then departed to summon the girl.

In a few minutes she entered the apartment, and a look of surprise appeared on her face as she beheld the detective.

Joe Phenix had made such a complete change in his appearance that it was with difficulty the girl persuaded herself that he could be the same man who had saved her from a watery grave, although he had sent word that it was Uncle Toby Johnson who wanted to see her.

The veteran detective noticed the look of bewilderment on the face of the girl and understood what caused it so he spoke at once to relieve her mind.

"Do not be alarmed, Bessie, I am the man with whom you conversed on the dock the other night," he said.

"I know that I don't present the same appearance, but that is owing to the peculiar circumstances of the case."

"Oh, yes, I understand, sir," the girl replied. "But I would not have believed that it could be possible for any one to make such a change in their appearance."

"That is a part of my business, of course," Joe Phenix answered. "And now take a chair and tell me how you have got on."

The girl seated herself and a bright smile came over her face as she said:

"I did just as you told me. The French woman was in waiting when I came home, and I did not give her a chance to say anything, but told her at once that I had been to see my uncle and he had told me that if I was innocent I had nothing to fear and should meet all accusations with a bold front."

"That statement rather amazed her, I presume?" Joe Phenix observed.

"Oh, yes, and she exclaimed immediately, 'Don't you fear being arrested?' 'No, I do not!' I replied. 'I have not done anything wrong, and why should I be afraid?' She was very much surprised, meditated over the matter for a few moments, and then said: 'Well, I don't want to be hasty about the matter so I will take until morning to think it over.'"

"You see that it was just as I told you," Joe Phenix remarked. "When she found that you did not fear the police the woman did not dare to carry out her threats."

"Yes, that was the truth, and in the morning she came to me all smiles—the deceitful wretch!" the girl exclaimed in honest indignation. "And she said that when she had spoken to Mr. McAdee about the matter—Mr. McAdee is Mr. Mullett's valet—he said that it was all a joke of his, he had put the jewel in my trunk, and it was only a common, worthless thing—not a diamond at all—so as to play a trick about me, and then she asked my pardon for her unjust suspicions and hoped I would not be angry with her."

"Everything turned out then exactly as I anticipated."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, the trouble is all over for the present."

"Oh, yes."

"And if she thinks that you have an uncle who is ready and willing to take your part, it is not likely that she will try to play any more tricks upon you."

"Well, I don't know," the girl replied, in a doubtful way.

"She is a deceitful wretch, and I feel quite sure that she would willingly do all in her power to harm me."

"I agree with you in regard to that, but you must try and conduct yourself so she will not be able to get a chance at you."

"Oh, yes, you may be sure that I will do that!" the girl declared.

"It is my impression that, besides being deceitful, the woman is capable of committing a crime if she thought there was a good chance that she would not be detected."

"Yes, I should not be surprised, for she is a miserable creature!" Bessie exclaimed.

"Now then, I want you to be on the watch, and if you see anything suspicious in the woman's conduct, you must write to me, so as to give me an opportunity to frustrate her plans, you understand."

"Oh, yes, I will be glad to do it!" Bessie declared, immediately.

"The horrible creature did her best to drive me to despair, and it will be a pleasure for me to do all I can to bring her to justice if she does anything wrong."

"I know I am not very smart," the girl continued. "But I have got sense enough to hold my tongue and keep a sharp lookout."

"It is important, you know, that she should not suspect you are on the watch," the disguised detective cautioned.

"Oh, yes, I understand that, and you may be sure I will be extremely careful."

Then Joe Phenix explained to the girl how she could communicate with him, and took his departure.

CHAPTER XXII.

A NEW DISGUISE.

THE veteran detective was very well satisfied with the way in which matters were progressing.

"These fellows are undoubtedly able and acute scoundrels, and will play a most excellent game, but I think I will succeed in trapping them in the long run for it is certain that they will be apt to make some false move which will give me a chance at them," he murmured, communing with himself as he proceeded toward his home.

As the present disguise had served his purpose he proposed to assume another.

When he arrived at his residence he proceeded to the room where he kept his costumes, and Joe Phenix had enough of these to make even a veteran actor turn green with envy.

He selected a neat, dark suit, and after he was arrayed in it proceeded to stain his face and hands with a wash, which he had in a bottle, so as to give the skin the appearance of having been bronzed by the sun.

When this task was completed the detective put on a black wig the hair of which curled in little, crispy ringlets.

After this was done the man-hunter surveyed himself in the full-length mirror which stood between the windows at the end of the room.

The transformation was complete.

The altering of the complexion and the assumption of the wig gave the detective such a foreign appearance that even the most careless observer would never have made the mistake of thinking him to be of an English-speaking race.

"There, I think that will do very well," the detective remarked.

Joe Phenix disappears and Count Orloff Kanoski takes his place, and if I can't succeed in winning the good opinion of this baron, and his allies, then the man and his associates are much smarter than I take them to be.

"The first thing on the programme though is to hunt up the young lawyer and warn him that he is likely to be led into a trap."

Then the man-hunter sallied forth.

Thanks to the information which he had obtained from the Live Yankee, he had no difficulty in finding Shelstone.

That gentleman had finished his office work and was about to depart for his boarding-house, so he was at leisure to listen to what the disguised detective had to say.

After having assured himself that there wasn't any likelihood of any one being able to overhear what was said, Joe Phenix proceeded at once to business.

"Allow me to introduce myself," he said, with a stately bow. "I am called Orloff Kanoski, and in Russia bear the title of count. I am a member of the Secret Inquiry Office and, at present, am prosecuting certain researches in this country, so it happens that some facts have come to my knowledge, which concern you."

"Is it possible?" the young man asked, very much astonished by this information.

"Yes, and I think it important that you should know the particulars."

"I shall be very much obliged for any information which may prove to be valuable to me, of course," the young lawyer remarked.

"In speaking I shall have to bring in the name of Miss Pauline Mullett," the disguised detective remarked.

Shelstone looked surprised.

"Miss Mullett?" he said in a questioning tone.

"Yes, you are paying attentions to that lady which her father does not approve of, as he has hopes of marrying her to a foreign nobleman."

"Your information is correct."

"The old gentleman has a great idea of the importance of a certain foreigner, a man who says he is a French nobleman, and calls himself the Baron St. Germaine."

"Yes, I am aware of that fact—not of my own knowledge, you comprehend, for I never met the man," Shelstone explained. "But Miss Pauline has explained how deeply her father seems to be interested in him."

"It is to this baron, or one of his friends, that Mr. Mullett hopes to marry his daughter."

"I presume so, but such a marriage will never take place if the young lady has anything to say about the matter."

"I am aware that Miss Pauline is not favorably disposed toward either the baron or his friends, but as the men feel sure of the father's consent it is likely that they will do all in their power to get the young lady to look with a favorable eye upon the one particular man who will be put forward as a suitor for her hand."

"From the way in which you speak it would appear as if these men were engaged in a sort of a conspiracy," young Shelstone observed, in a thoughtful way.

"That is just the idea that I have!" the pretended Russian remarked.

"Isn't it rather odd that French noblemen should engage in such a thing?"

"There is considerable doubt in my mind in regard to their being men of rank," the disguised detective replied.

"It is my impression that they are adventurers who have no claim to the titles which they pretend to bear," Joe Phenix continued.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young man, startled by the assertion. "If this is a fact, then Miss Pauline is threatened by a dreadful peril, for I am aware that the old gentleman is doing all in his power to make her give me up, so as to accept the attentions of one of these foreigners."

"Yes, I know that to be a fact," the other replied.

"You see the trouble is that Mr. Mullett is a little weak in the upper story in certain respects," Joe Phenix added.

"He is a regular old donkey!" the young man declared, with sudden heat. "And there isn't any doubt that these Frenchmen are making a perfect fool of him."

"Yes, he is completely infatuated by them, and if, as I strongly suspect, they are nothing better than a gang of swindlers, the chances are great that Mr. Mullett will pay dearly for his folly before he gets through with the party."

"Oh, yes, there isn't any doubt about that!" Shelstone declared.

"As far as Mullett himself is concerned the Frenchmen have got him in such a condition that they can do almost anything they like with him, but neither the young lady nor the mother fancy these so-called titled foreigners."

"Correct! you can be sure of that, and I am perfectly satisfied that the young lady will keep her faith with me no matter how hard her father may try to persuade her to the contrary!" the young lawyer asserted.

"You are fortunate in having secured the affections of so devoted a young lady," the pretended Russian remarked with a grave bow.

"And now I will come to the object of my visit," he continued. "It is my opinion that these Frenchmen are a gang of adventurers, whose sole motive for cultivating Mullett's acquaintance is for the purpose of plundering him, and from what I have been able to learn regarding them it is my impression that they are an uncommonly shrewd set of rascals."

"Yes, I have no doubt but that is the truth," Shelstone coincided.

"They way in which they have succeeded in pulling the wool over Mullett's eyes is a pretty good proof of that," the young man continued. "For the old gentleman is tolerably smart, although he is making a donkey of himself just now."

"If these men are the shrewd and able scoundrels that I suspect them to be it is certain that they fully understand the situation."

"Yes, I should imagine so."

"They comprehend then that although the father is desirous that his daughter should marry one of the gang, yet the girl herself is never likely to consent as long as she is engaged to you."

"And I have perfect faith that she will keep her word with me," the young man declared.

"Exactly! and when these rascals come to that conclusion, as they will be sure to do, after a careful examination of the situation, it seems to me that they will be apt to come to the determination that you are a stumbling block in their way, and that they will not be able to make much progress toward the accomplishment of their designs until the engagement between you and Miss Pauline is broken off."

"You are right!" Shelstone exclaimed. "Undoubtedly you have come to a correct conclusion."

"I presume you now perceive why I have called upon you?"

"You wished to put me on my guard against these men?"

"Exactly, for I have a firm belief that they will try to damage you in some way."

"These foreign adventurers are apt to be desperate fellows," Shelstone remarked, thoughtfully. "And in this case too they are playing for a great stake, for if they succeed in getting Pauline to marry one of them, there is no doubt that the old man is infatuated enough to settle a big sum of money on his daughter, which the husband, of course, stands a good chance of getting a good share of to do as he pleases with."

"It is likely."

"And the fellows finding me in their way might be desperate enough to strike even at my life."

"Men of this stamp have been known to commit deeds of blood for even less reason," the disguised detective asserted.

"So it is well for you to be on your guard against all foreigners," he continued. "Also take particular care not to expose yourself to any attack."

"You may rest assured that I will look out for myself!" Shelstone declared. "And if the rascals get a chance to attack me unawares they will have to be smarter than I take them to be."

"Forewarned is forearmed!" the disguised detective observed with a smile.

Then the young man thanked the supposed Russian for his kindly warning, and the interview ended.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FRENCHMEN ARE PUZZLED.

It is a week since the day when Joe Phenix, disguised as a Russian count, called upon the young lawyer, and during that time but little has happened of interest to any of the characters of our tale.

Major Buffam, intent upon carrying out the plot arranged between him and the Baron St. Germaine, had made Shelstone's acquaintance, and did his best to get on intimate terms with him, but that gentleman, thanks to the detective's warning, was on his guard, and so the major only had his labor for his pains.

Joe Phenix, in his assumed character of Count Kanoski, had been introduced by the Live Yankee into the Mullett mansion, and had succeeded in making a favorable impression upon all the inmates.

He had made the acquaintance of the two Frenchmen, also, the baron and the major, and the acute detective had done his best to get on friendly terms with them.

He played the role of a man possessed of plenty of money, fond of pleasure and disposed to pay liberally for his enjoyment; not a wild, spendthrift youth who was so reckless as to throw his cash away, but a well-balanced man of the world, who understood the value of gold, and was willing to part with it provided he secured a fair amount of enjoyment.

The Frenchmen were a little shy of the Russian at first, for there was something about the man which impressed them with the belief that he was no ordinary pigeon who could be plucked with impunity, but after they had been with him three or four times, and found that though a bold and reckless player, he was by no means a good one, and was disposed to lose quite a sum of money without grumbling, they came to the conclusion that it would pay for them to cultivate his acquaintance.

There was a Franco-Italian restaurant and wine-shop in Bleeker street, with a hotel, too. It was in the European style, for there were lodging-rooms to rent in the upper part of the building, and there were private rooms, too, where the foreign element could gamble to their hearts' content.

To this establishment the Frenchmen had introduced the Russian after they had come to the conclusion that they could profit by continuing his acquaintance.

On this particular night that we again take up the thread of our story, the Frenchmen and the Russian had been having a battle royal at cards.

The baron and the major had arranged a nice little game.

Being in want of money, they had come to the conclusion that if they managed matters shrewdly they could succeed in winning a goodly sum from the count.

Apparently the scheme they arranged was so perfect that it could not fail to work successfully, and the Russian seemed to walk blindly into the trap, but when the game ended, a little after midnight, the conspirators discovered to their disgust that they had not profited much by the evening's amusement.

The Russian had departed in a cab while the two Frenchmen retired to a private room, ordered a bottle of brandy, and sat down to consult in regard to the matter.

"I do not understand it!" the baron cried, with knitted brows.

He had been counting his money and made the discovery that he was only a couple of dollars ahead, which fact he communicated to his companion.

Then the major examined his money and was amazed to find that he was five dollars worse off than when he had begun.

The baron was surprised when this was made known to him.

"It is apparent, then, that the Russian must have won a few dollars," the baron remarked, with a gloomy shake of the head.

"Yes, it seems so, and I am puzzled to account for it, for he appeared to play worse even than usual to-night."

"Ah, but he was singularly lucky in holding good cards at two or three critical points of the game," the major observed.

"Yes, I remember, and it was that fact that enabled him to escape severe losses," the baron said in a reflective way.

"I was in hopes when he began to drink so freely during the middle of the game that he would get in such a condition we would not have any trouble in fleeing him."

"Oh, no, there was not the slightest chance of that!" the baron declared.

"And it is evident that you don't know these Russians as well as I do, or you would never make the mistake of thinking that it is an easy matter to get one of them drunk."

"Yes, I believe they are great drinkers," the major remarked.

"Brandy is like mother's milk to these Russians, they are used to it from childhood, and it takes a fearful quantity of liquor to get one of the race in such a condition as not to know what he is doing."

"But the liquor certainly seemed to produce a decided effect upon him," the major urged.

"Oh, yes, that is true enough; but if he had drank twice as much he would not have betrayed the effects any more."

"What do you think of this Russian, anyway?" the major asked, abruptly.

The baron pondered for a time over the question, and then he shook his head.

"Really, I am puzzled," he replied at last.

"Yes, so am I."

"The man is so entirely different from any one that I ever encountered that it is hard work for me to make up my mind about him."

"Do you suppose that it can be possible he can be in the same line as ourselves?" the major asked.

"I had a thought of that kind in the beginning when I first encountered him," the baron observed. "But although I have kept a close watch on him in a quiet way, I have not seen any signs to make me satisfied that he is a hawk."

"He certainly hasn't tried to rope us into any games," the major remarked. "Nor has he made any attempt on Mullett."

"That is true, for I have had my eyes on him, thinking that he might try some scheme of the kind," the baron declared.

"He is a great gambler, but merely seems to play because he loves the excitement of the game, and not for the sake of the money involved."

"You are right about that," the baron assented. "He doesn't seem to care whether he wins or loses, and this passion for gambling for the sake of gambling is a trait common to these Russians."

"Have you noticed that he appears to be partial to our society?" the major asked.

"Oh, yes; I saw that from the beginning," the other answered; "and that fact led me to suspect that he might be a hawk in disguise, who had made the mistake of thinking we were a couple of pigeons who might be worth the plucking."

"I had about the same idea in regard to him, but I am satisfied it is not correct."

"He is not in our line, yet I am inclined to believe he is not exactly what he represents himself to be," the baron assumed.

"Just what I think!" the major supplemented.

"I have not much of anything to go on," the baron continued, "but, somehow, I feel that this Russian may turn out to be a dangerous customer."

"I understand!" the major exclaimed. "I have felt the same way about him. I have an impression that the man is not all right, and yet I cannot tell you why I think so."

"The dread that every stranger whose character we cannot fathom in a short time is likely to prove dangerous to us, becomes a second nature to men in our line after years of experience," the baron observed.

"The life we lead makes us in time, I think, of the instinct of the animal," St. Germaine continued.

"Yes, undoubtedly!"

"It is my impression that this man is a hawk, but not one of the kind that we took him to be at first."

"I comprehend," the major assented.

"He is not a hawk who preys upon fat pigeons, likely to afford good pickings, but one of the birds of prey who hunts down men who are in our line."

"Yes, you have voiced my thought!" the major declared.

"The idea certainly does seem reasonable," the major continued, with a grave shake of the head.

"The man is a stranger to me," the baron remarked, thoughtfully. "I have a most excellent memory, and if I had ever encountered him in Europe I would be sure to recollect the circumstance."

"Undoubtedly! for his personality is very marked, and a man of his type once met is not apt to be forgotten."

"But, my dear fellow, in thinking over the past I do not recall any affair in which we were engaged momentous enough to warrant anybody in sending a bloodhound clear across the ocean in search of us," St. Germaine observed.

"Oh, I do not think that anything of that kind has been done," the major asserted.

"My idea in regard to the matter is that if this man is a Russian spy he is in this country on political business."

"Ah, yes, that may be true."

"It is a well understood fact that the Russian Government keep political spies in all the principal cities of the world in order to watch the movements of the exiled members of the secret societies, who have done so much to make trouble in Russia."

"Yes, yes, and this man is one of the spies, and in some way he got an idea in his head that we might be connected with the political conspirators," the baron observed, thoughtfully.

"That is the way I explain the matter."

"And I do not doubt that you are correct. Well, he will not be able to trouble us, but if he interferes with us we may trouble him."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BOLD SCHEME.

A DARK look appeared on the major's face as his comrade gave utterance to the threat.

"Yes, you are right!" the major exclaimed. "We are not the kind of men to stand any nonsense, and if this fellow meddles with us we will be apt to give him a lesson which he will not forget as long as he lives."

"That is just what we must do," the baron remarked in a reflective way.

"I can understand how, if the man is a Russian spy, he could be led into the error of thinking we were interested in these political refugees," St. Germaine continued. "It may be possible that he has employed some one to watch us, and the spy has performed the work so cleverly that we have not detected him."

"Yes, it is possible, but I do not think it is probable," the major observed, evidently doubtful. "It is my opinion that no one could have shadowed us without our knowledge."

"Well, as we were not on our guard against anything of the kind, the task could have been performed if the man set to do the work was an extra skillful one."

"Oh, well, as I said, it is not impossible," the major observed. "At the same time I doubt very much whether anything of the kind has been done."

"We will assume that a spy has been on our track," the baron argued. "And if so, then we have certainly acted in a way likely to excite suspicion that we have some deep purpose on hand."

"That is undoubtedly true, for we do mingle at times with some very suspicious characters, and pay visits to places which men of our supposed standing in society would never visit," the major remarked, with a laugh.

"Exactly! that is the way I look at the matter, and so it does not appear strange to me that if this man is a Russian spy, sent to this country to keep an eye upon political refugees, and he has had a watch put upon us, that our actions would lead him to suspect we are engaged in some underhand work."

"There is a deal of sense in what you say," the major admitted.

"But I say, my brave!" Buffam exclaimed, abruptly. "There is still another theory which we have not taken into consideration."

"What is that?"

"This man may be a police spy!"

The baron appeared disturbed for a moment, and then he shook his head.

"Oh, no, I do not think that is probable," he rejoined.

"Well, I will admit that it does not seem very probable to me, but still there is a chance that it may be so, you know, and in a case of this kind it seems to me that we ought to take all the chances into consideration."

"Yes, that is true," the baron observed, thoughtfully. "And if that surmise should prove to be correct we most certainly would be in serious danger."

"Very true! and we are not wise if we do

not take into consideration the fact that this man may be a police spy."

"By Heaven! if I thought that he was one I would lay a trap for him from which he would never come alive!" the baron declared, with sudden ferocity.

"We would have to do something of the kind, of course," the major assented.

"It would be a case of either his life or ours, and, most certainly, we would be a pair of fools if we did not strike at the man before he got a chance to strike at us."

"Oh, yes, that goes without saying," the major responded.

"Now, then, the situation resolves itself into this," Buffam continued.

"If the man is merely a Russian spy we haven't anything to fear from him, for we have never been foolish enough to mix ourselves up with any political business, but if he is a bloodhound of the police then we must take measures to remove him from our path for we are in danger of being trapped by the detectives if we attempt to do any work."

"Yes, you have described the situation correctly, beyond a doubt," the baron assented.

"We would be very imprudent then not to be on our guard until we ascertain just what this man is," the major declared.

"And it is important, too, that we do that as soon as possible," the baron remarked.

"Oh, yes; it would not be wise for us to go ahead, for it would give this fellow a chance to pounce on us when we least expected, and were least prepared for it."

"No, no! We must not take a step likely to compromise us until we ascertain all the particulars about this man, so that we can make up our mind as to just how dangerous he is."

"And if we find that he really is a detective in disguise, and therefore likely to interfere in our plans, we must take measures to put him out of the way," the baron remarked with grim determination.

"Oh, yes, we cannot allow any fellow of the kind to spoil all our carefully laid plans," the major assented.

"I will put a couple of spies on his track to-morrow, and there is hardly a doubt that in a week or two my agents will be able to give me a true account of just who and what the man is."

"You must select a couple of extra good people, for this fellow is no fool, and it will not be an easy matter to entrap him," the major warned.

"Yes, I am aware of that, and I shall not employ any bunglers," the baron replied.

"I have a pair in my mind now, a man and woman who are extra cunning, and I have no doubt that they will be able to do the job."

"Do I know them?"

"Yes. Papa Gervain and his wife, Celeste."

"You are right. Both of them are uncommonly smart, but Celeste is now in the Mullett mansion playing the role of a lady's maid," the major observed.

"It will be easy enough for her to get leave of absence for a couple of weeks, and I can supply her place with Rosa Howard," the baron answered.

"Yes, that would do, and, to my thinking, Rosa would do better than Celeste, for she is more amiable, and not so quick-tempered."

"You are right about that, I think," the baron observed in a reflective way. "I have been thinking of making a change for the last week."

"Celeste has not succeeded in making a favorable impression upon either the mother or daughter," St. Germaine continued.

"The fact is that she is far better calculated to deceive men than women," the major remarked.

"Yes, that is correct, and it was a mistake to send her to the house. Rosa is not so deep and artful, but she is far better tempered, and much more calculated to produce a favorable impression."

"The change will undoubtedly be to our advantage."

"Then I will have Papa and Celeste fix themselves up in good style, and send them in the guise of French tourists, who have come to America to see the country, to the Fifth Avenue Hotel where this Russian has his quarters."

"Yes, yes, I see!" exclaimed the major, rubbing his hands, gleefully, together. "It is a capital scheme!"

"It will be an easy matter for Papa to make this Russian's acquaintance, and then an introduction to Celeste will follow as a matter of course, and if the two do not succeed in finding out all about this fellow then he is a deal shrewder than I take him to be," the baron remarked in a way which plainly showed how satisfied he was that the scheme would succeed.

"So much for the spy, and now let us discuss the Mullett affair," the major observed. "I suppose that it is apparent to you that things in that quarter are not going on as well as they might?"

"Oh, yes, neither you nor I seem to make much headway in gaining the girl's affections."

"That is true enough!" the major declared with a grimace.

"As far as I am concerned, I am not astonished for I made up my mind some time ago that I stood no chance," the baron remarked.

"In fact, I never posed as a lady's man, and never could plume myself, on my success with girls of this class, so I am not surprised that I did not succeed, but you are just the kind of fellow to make a favorable impression on a girl of this sort."

The major shook his head.

"My dear fellow, when a woman is over head-and-ears in love with a man it is almost impossible for another man to find favor in her eyes."

"Yes, that is true, and despite the opposition of her father she is inclined to cling to this young lawyer."

"Oh, that is the way the case always stands!" the major declared.

"The stronger the opposition of the parents, the greater, as a rule, the attachment of the girl."

"Yes, I believe that is a fact."

"Undoubtedly, my dear fellow!" the major assented.

"I am sorry that matters are as they are, for I have taken a fancy to the girl, independent of the fact that I would come in for a good bit of money by marrying her."

"Oh, she is an attractive young woman—no doubt about that," the baron remarked.

"Yes, there is something about her youthful freshness very attractive to an old, experienced man of the world like myself," the major observed.

"Then, too, I would be deuced glad to get hold of the money which the old man will be certain to give her if she marries a husband who suits him."

"It is a pity the game cannot be arranged," the baron observed, reflectively.

"Oh, I haven't given it up as a bad job yet!" the other exclaimed in an egotistical way.

"I am aware that it will not be an easy matter to secure the prize," he continued.

"But as the stake is certainly a great one I can afford to take some trouble to win it."

"Yes, undoubtedly," the baron asserted.

"But how do you propose to set to work?"

"Remove the lawyer," the major answered immediately.

"Ah, yes, my dear fellow, it is all very well to say remove the man, but how can that little job be arranged?" the baron asked.

"I am afraid that you will not find it to be an easy matter. And did I not understand you to say that you were not able to get on intimate terms with him?"

"Yes, that is the truth," the other admitted. "The man is on his guard, and I am satisfied that the idea I had of having him led astray cannot be carried out."

"That is the conclusion to which I came from what you said."

"But there is more than one way to kill a cat, you understand," the major declared, with a significant smile.

"Oh, yes."

"And as I am willing to take considerable trouble in this matter—for when a man is engaged in a game for so great a stake he can afford to work hard—I will not be willing to admit that I cannot succeed until I have tried all the plans which I can think of; then, and not until then, will I be willing to admit that there isn't any chance for me."

"Will you use force?"

"No; I know a better game. I have ar-

ranged a scheme to strike at his reputation," the major replied.

"The old gentleman has a reception to-morrow night; we are to be present, you know, and also the lawyer, so I have arranged to have the blow fall then," the other explained.

"In the presence of all the assembled guests an accusation will be made against Shelstone which will astound everybody."

"The girl may refuse to believe that he is guilty."

"The proof will be so strong that she must believe. Listen, while I explain the scheme."

Attentively the baron heard the narrative, smiling in grim satisfaction as the tale went on.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN ASTONISHING ANNOUNCEMENT.

SINCE coming to New York Mr. Mullett had tried very hard to get in the "social swim," to use the cant phrase.

After he struck it so rich at Spanish Bar he was looked upon as a very great man by some of the people of the neighborhood.

That is, to his face the folks pretended to think highly of him, but all the old-timers who knew him when he used to run his little store made all manner of fun of him behind his back.

Even if he was pulling out a small fortune every month from the Live Yankee Mine, to their thinking he was no better man than when he and his wife had to "hustle hard," as these blunt Westerners put it, to make a living.

But to Mullett's astonishment he found, after he had arrived at New York, that unless a man had two or three million of dollars, and was disposed to spend his money like a prince, literally throw it away, he could not hope to amount to anything in the big, overgrown city.

Mullett came with letters of introduction to some of the brokers who were prominent in mining matters, and these gentlemen, anticipating that the Montana man would prove to be a profitable client did their best to be agreeable to him.

But they could not secure him the entree into "swell" New York society which he coveted, and it did not take Mullett long to find out that a man with no more money than he possessed did not amount to much in the great metropolis.

Through the kindly influence of the brokers he made a number of acquaintances who were disposed to be friendly, but there wasn't a swell family in the lot, and so when the old gentleman made the acquaintance of the Frenchmen he was disposed to make much of them.

Mullett had tried to curry favor with his new-made acquaintances by giving some little receptions, and as he had sense enough to put the whole affair in the hands of a caterer, at so much per head, these little events passed off tolerably well.

Mullett knew enough to understand that he was very far from being a big toad in the metropolitan puddle, and so he did not attempt to entertain a large number of guests.

Eight or ten was all he invited, and on the occasion of which we are about to write only six guests made their appearance.

There were the baron and the major, the Russian count, one of the mining brokers with his wife and young Shelstone.

The invitation of this last-named gentleman was due entirely to the obstinacy of the mother and daughter, for when the subject of the party was broached, both of them declared that if the young lawyer was not invited neither one of them would have anything to do with the affair.

Mullett was terribly enraged, and if he had not spoken to some of his broker friends about the dinner he would not have yielded to the demand.

Under the circumstances, though, as both his wife and daughter were determined about the matter, he was compelled to yield.

The dinner was a success, and after it ended the party adjourned to the parlor, where a professional pianist—a Pole, with a name as long as one's arm, whom Mr. Mullett had hired for the occasion, proceeded to entertain the company with some classical music.

Of course, after the piece was finished the

guests applauded, as in duty bound, although the majority of those present knew no more about music than they did of the interior of Siberia.

The talented European gentleman smiled blandly, and proceeded to prepare to still further delight his hearers, when there came a sudden interruption to the scene.

The butler made his appearance with the announcement that a lady wished to see Mr. Shelstone on particular business.

"A lady?" exclaimed the young man, surprised by the announcement, and rising as he spoke.

"Yes, sir, and though I tried to explain to her that it wasn't quite the correct thing for her to attempt to see you now, yet she persisted that she must have an interview with you," Crickley remarked.

"I do not comprehend what business she can possibly have with me!" Shelstone observed.

Just as he ended the sentence a young, and rather good-looking girl of twenty or thereabouts came marching into the room.

She was evidently an English girl, to judge from her red and white complexion, and her stout build, was somewhat flashily dressed and had a bold look.

A young woman whom a close observer would have set down as being able to take care of herself under all circumstances.

"Ah, Jerry, I have found you out at last have I?" the girl exclaimed in the most familiar manner to the young man, to whom she advanced as she spoke, totally ignoring everybody else in the room.

There was a look of surprise upon the faces of all present, for there wasn't one present but what had a suspicion that something out of the common was about to happen.

"Excuse me, madam, but are you addressing me?" young Shelton asked, both surprised and offended by the familiar style of the address.

"Who else?" the stranger exclaimed with a bravado air.

"Your name is Jeremiah Shelstone, isn't it?" she demanded.

"That is my name."

"And what do you mean by acting in this queer way?" the girl exclaimed, abruptly. "You look at me as though I wasn't right, and any one would imagine that you never saw me before!"

"Well, that is certainly the truth, I never did to the best of my knowledge and belief."

"What?" fairly shrieked the girl. "You don't mean to say that you have the cheek to deny me before all these people?"

"Deny you!" Shelstone exclaimed, beginning to believe that the woman must be a little out of her senses. "What on earth do you mean by denying you?"

"Ain't you my husband?" the girl cried angrily.

"Your husband!" the young lawyer exclaimed thunderstruck by the question.

"Yes, that is what I said!" the girl answered. "Didn't you marry me in Liverpool about fifteen months ago, and haven't I got a boy baby who is the very image of you?"

Shelstone stared at the woman, while the rest of the people in the apartment looked in speechless wonder.

The young lawyer quickly recovered though from the amazement in which he had been thrown by the unexpected speech.

"Young woman, you have either made some mistake, or else you are trying to play a little game upon me!" Shelstone declared.

"Oh, no! I have not made any mistake, nor am I trying to play any game!" the girl cried, defiantly.

"I supposed that you would try to get out of it, but I didn't think you would have the brass to dispute the truth right to my very face."

"Ladies and gentlemen!" she continued, addressing her conversation to Mr. Mullett and the rest, who were staring at the girl with all the eyes in their heads, "I am sorry to be obliged to trouble you with my family matters, for I know that you can't possibly take any interest in them; still, mebbe, it is just as well that you should know just what kind of a man this fine gentleman is!"

And her voice was full of contempt as she pointed disdainfully to Shelstone, who was so annoyed that he did not know what to do.

"I am going to tell you a plain, straightforward story, and then you can judge for yourselves just what kind of a man he is."

"See here, young woman, I warn you to be careful!" the young man cried in exasperation.

"If you tell any falsehoods about me, you will surely find yourself in the hands of the law, for I am not the kind of man to stand any nonsense."

"Oh, yes, of course you will try to make me hold my tongue, but I am going to have justice if I die for it!" the stranger retorted in a defiant way.

"What I am going to say, ladies and gentlemen, I can prove," she continued. "And I can assure you that I did not come clear across the ocean without taking care to bring ample proof with me."

"My story will be short, and it ain't a bit sweet, but I ain't the first young woman who has been fool enough to marry a stranger without knowing much of anything about him."

And here she gave a decided sniff of contempt in Shelstone's direction.

"Go ahead with your story!" the young lawyer exclaimed, sternly. "And you can rest assured that if you make any accusations against me, you will be called upon to prove them in a right speedy manner!"

"And that is just what I can do, too!" the girl retorted.

"You needn't think you can cheek it out, for you can't, no way you can fix it!"

"I am only a poor girl, but I have always borne a good name, and held my head up with the rest of them," she continued.

"I was born Arabella Snodkins in London town, but my parents moved to Liverpool when I was about fifteen years old, and soon after that I got a chance to go as barmaid to the public house, The Mersey Royal Arms, and there is where I met this man," and she pointed with the air of a tragedy queen to Shelstone.

"Ridiculous!" the young lawyer exclaimed, impatiently. "I never was in the place in my life!"

"Oh, yes, of course you will deny it, but you just wait and see if I don't make my words good!" the girl cried.

"He said he was an American, and was on his way to London to attend to some business," she continued.

"He made mortal fierce love to me, and said as how he would be delighted to marry me."

"I was a fool, of course, to listen to a man who I didn't know anythink about," she continued.

"But he talked so fair and sweet, saying I was the only girl that he had ever seen that he had ever taken a fancy to, that my head was turned, and before I really knew what I was doing I had agreed to marry him."

"This is perfectly and utterly absurd!" the young lawyer declared.

"Suppose you let me tell my story and have done with it," the girl exclaimed, indignantly.

"Where are your manners, too, to interrupt a lady?" she continued.

"Well, as I was a-saying, ladies and gentlemen, I was fool enough to believe that he was honest when he said that I was a head and shoulder above any lass that he had ever met, so he persuaded me to go to London with me, and there we were married."

"I fancy you will find it will be a pretty difficult matter to find that statement to be true," the young lawyer exclaimed.

"You just wait until I get through, and then you may change your mind about that," she retorted, defiantly.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, it didn't take me long to come to the conclusion, after I was married, that there was somethink queer about my husband," she continued.

"We had taken furnished lodgings in London, but though my man seemed to have plenty of money and went away every day to attend to business, yet I could never find out just what the business was."

"Somethink in the city, he always told me when I asked him, just as the song says, but what that somethink was I couldn't get out of him."

"Then one morning he went off as usual, and he didn't come back."

"I thought somethink had happened to him, and so I went to the police, but they

were up to all games of the kind, and when I told 'em how worried I was they just laughed at me. 'Oh, no, he's all right,' they said. 'You ought to know enough to be up to a lark of this kind. Your Yankee has just got tired of you and bolted!'"

"Ah, yes, yes, this is a very likely story!" Shelstone exclaimed, unable to restrain his indignation.

"I wish I may die if that wasn't just what the police beak—the magistrate, I mean—told me!" the girl declared.

"Well, I am not the kind of creature to cry over spilt milk," she continued with the air of a philosopher.

"So, says I to myself, say I, 'if he has bolted, why just let him go and goodfiddance to bad rubbish!'"

"A very wise conclusion indeed!" Shelstone remarked in a sarcastic way.

"And as I was able to make a good living for myself I wouldn't have troubled my head about you, only after my baby was born I thought it was a shame that he should have to grow up without knowing any thing about his father, and as some friends of mine were going to cross the pond I made arrangements to come with them; then as luck would have it, I spotted you on Broadway a week after I landed, but I didn't go right up and let you know I was after you, for I was afraid you would bolt again," the girl asserted with a knowing grin.

"Oh, yes, of course, I am just the sort of man to do a thing of that kind," the young lawyer remarked.

"I just laid low, for I made up my mind to find out all about you before I let you know I was on this side of the water."

"Very prudent of you indeed," Shelstone observed with a grim smile.

He fancied that he had taken the woman's measure now, metaphorically speaking, and understood just about what game she intended to play.

"I followed you to your office, and didn't have any trouble in finding out what I wanted to know, then I just put some friends of mine on the scent and they finished up the business, and that is how I came to be here this evening."

"You see, I wanted to put in my claim to you right before your swell friends, so they would understand just what kind of a man you were."

"This story of yours is utterly ridiculous, as I said in the first place," Shelstone remarked in cold disdain. "I never saw you before in my life, and you know very well that no marriage between us ever took place in England or anywhere else."

"Oh, I suppose you are going to try to make me believe that I have made a mistake, and that you are not the man I think you are!" the girl exclaimed, sneeringly.

"Not at all!" the young lawyer replied, decidedly. "I am not going to try to make you believe anything at all."

"You know what the truth is as well as I do, and you ought also to be aware that this statement of yours goes for nothing unless you can support it by proofs."

"That is just what I can do!" the girl declared in an angry way.

"Oh, you can?" and Shelstone's tone was incredulous in the extreme.

"Yes, here are my marriage lines!" and with the declaration she thrust her hand into her pocket and pulled out a legal-looking document.

"Here!" the girl cried to Mullett. "You will see that I get fair play, I know."

"Oh, yes, certainly!" the old gentleman replied, very much astonished by this strange scene.

"I am not afraid to trust you with this valuable document, though I wouldn't like to give this husband of mine a chance to get it into his hands, for it is my idea that he wouldn't think nothing of destroying it in a minute if he got a good opportunity."

"Upon my word! if this isn't about the coolest piece of impudence that I ever heard of!" Shelstone exclaimed indignantly.

"Oh, yes, you are just the kind of man to ride the high horse, but I know you, and I wouldn't trust you any further than I can see you!" the girl exclaimed.

"You cut your lucky and ran from me in England, leaving me in the lurch, and I know that you wouldn't be too good to play

a nasty trick on me now, if I wasn't up to your games!

"But you just read the paper, sir, and see what it says!" she continued to Mullett.

The old gentleman put on his eye-glasses—he had orbs like a hawk, but he thought it gave him a dignified and solid look to wear glasses and so he used them.

"Let me see," he said, endeavoring to assume the air of a magistrate engaged on an important case. "This appears to be a marriage certificate."

"That is just what it is!" the girl declared.

"No more, and no less."

"It witnesses that at the parish church of St. Pancras, Joseph H. Smith, bachelor, was united in wedlock to Arabella Snodkins, spinster," Mullett announced.

"That is it—that is the ticket!" the girl exclaimed, triumphantly.

"The ceremony was performed by the rector, William Goodchild, and witnessed by Thomas Clark and Amos Hodges," the old gentleman continued.

"Two young men who happened to be in the neighborhood of the church and who kindly volunteered to stand up for us when they found that we didn't have any friends," the girl explained.

"This certificate certainly seems to be all correct," Mullett observed, examining the document with the air of a man who had a vast experience in such matters.

"My name is not Joseph H. Smith," the young lawyer observed, with a sarcastic smile.

"I know that, but that is what you called yourself when I married you, and it was all a game of yours to make a fool of me!" the girl cried, angrily.

"Perhaps you can prove this!" Shelstone retorted.

"I can and will, and now, too!" she declared.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WITNESSES.

ALL within the apartment looked astonished, for the girl spoke in such a confident way that it certainly seemed as though she firmly believed she could prove her case.

"Oh, yes, I wasn't fool enough to come clear across the ocean to hunt you Yankee down without being good and ready to back up my words!" the girl declared.

Then, to the amazement of all she retreated to the door and called out:

"You two are to come in if you please."

A couple of rather poorly dressed men, whose demeanor plainly revealed that they were Englishmen, made their appearance.

They had their hats in their hands, and as they came into the room they ducked their heads, while the professional smirk of the humble servitor appeared on their faces.

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to have the pleasure of introducing these two gents to you," the girl remarked, again advancing to her former position in the center of the room, and waving the two strangers forward in a commanding way.

"This is Mister Thomas Clark"—and she pointed to the taller and older of the pair, who immediately made an obsequious bow.

"And this is Mister Amos Hodges."

The short fellow ducked his head and grinned after the fashion of his companion.

"These are the two gents who saw me married at St. Pancras's to Joseph H. Smith, and both them put their names as witnesses on my marriage certificate."

"That is the truth, ain't it?" she exclaimed, putting the question directly to the men.

"Oh, yes, both of us saw you spliced in good style," Clark responded.

"And we did our best to give you a good send-off too!" the other assented with a grin.

"And both of you had a good look at the man I married, hey?" the girl asked.

"Oh, yes, we wasn't blind!" the taller fellow declared.

"Oh, no, not much!" his companion coincided.

"And if you saw the man I married, Joseph H. Smith, you would know him again, wouldn't you?" the girl asked.

"You had better believe we would!" Clark answered in the most positive manner.

"Know him!" the other Englishman exclaimed. "Why, bless you! I have got his

face so firmly fixed in my knowledge box, that I am certain I could pick him out anywhere, no matter if he was in a crowd of ten thousand!"

"Do you see him here?" the girl demanded.

And then both the men simultaneously raised their right hands and pointed to the young lawyer.

"There he is!" they exclaimed in chorus.

The witnesses to this strange scene looked on with the greatest interest, but Shelstone only smiled in a contemptuous manner when he was so promptly identified.

"You sure that you haven't made any mistake about this man—he is the Joseph H. Smith that you saw me married to in England?" the girl asked.

"Oh, no, there isn't any mistake!" Clark responded, promptly. "He is the man, sure enough!"

"Oh, yes, I would be willing to swear to it on a stack of Bibles as high as a church steeple!" the other Englishman declared.

"Really, I am astounded!" Mullett remarked, as he handed the certificate back to the girl, who immediately stowed it away in her pocket, as though she was dreadfully afraid of losing it.

"Of course, you thought you were playing an awful cunning game!" the English girl declared, with flashing eyes.

"You never imagined, I suppose, that there wasn't any danger of a poor girl like myself being able to follow you across the ocean, but I did do it, not that I cared two pins for you, for I don't. I hate you now, and I wouldn't live with you if you wanted me to!"

And vindictive indeed was the way in which she spoke.

"But I am in dead earnest to get satisfaction," she continued.

"I am not going to have you, my lawfully-wedded husband, go galivanting here among the Yankees, making out, no doubt, that you ain't never been married, and perhaps you may take it into your head to fool some Yankee girl as you fooled me, but you sha'n't do it if I can help it."

"This accusation is absolutely absurd!" the young lawyer exclaimed. "And I defy you to come into a law-court for the purpose of proving it."

"If I am your husband, as you say, and deserted you in this cruel manner, you can very easily get a judgment against me for your support, and also for the support of your child."

"I would scorn to take a penny of your money after the mean way in which you have treated me!" the girl declared, indignantly.

"No, sir. I would be willing to work my fingers to the bone first!"

"A very laudable spirit, indeed, if you are honest in your declaration, which you are not!" Shelstone exclaimed, sarcastically.

"You may fancy that I don't understand this little game which you are trying to play at my expense, but I do."

"You do not dare to come into a court and attempt to prove the truth of this story, for you know very well that you cannot do it."

"It is an easy matter for these two fellows to declare that I am the man whom they saw married to you in England, but it is an utter falsehood, and they know it, too."

"It may be a case of mistaken identity," the Russian count suggested.

Both of the Englishmen shook their heads, and the girl gave a sniff of contempt.

"Oh, no, he is the man, sure enough!" she declared. "There isn't any mistake about it, but he is trying the Yankee game of bluff."

"It doesn't make any difference to me!" she added contemptuously. "I made up my mind to expose him, so as to show the people just what kind of a man he is, and now I am satisfied."

"I wouldn't take any of your money if I was starving," she continued, "so you need not try to make out that I want to come any blackmail game on you."

"Oh, I understand just what you are up to!" the young lawyer exclaimed.

"This is a cunning trick on the part of some enemy who desires to blast my reputation without giving me a chance to refute the charge, but it is a scheme which will not

work, for I will take measures to bring all three of you at once into court on a charge of slander."

"My character is worth something to me, and I can tell you that I will spend my money as freely as though it was so much water to defend it."

"You shall have a chance to prove this accusation in open court, and if you cannot make the charge good, perhaps I will be able to show you that you made a great mistake when you allowed yourself to be led into this scheme."

"Oh, you can't frighten me with your bluffs!" the girl retorted. "I am ready to come into court as soon as you want to fetch me, and if I can't prove what I say is the truth, then I am willing to suffer, and fairer than that I can't say!"

"We don't take no interest in this 'ere thing, for it isn't any business of ours," the elder Englishman now protested in a smooth and oily way.

"We happened to come to this country in the same steamer with this young woman, and when she asked us if we were willing to come forward and identify her man, if she found him, we didn't see why we should object."

"It was only fair for us to do all we could for her," the other Briton added. "And it wouldn't be the cheese for us to refuse, seeing that she was a countrywoman."

"I am not afraid to face the music!" the girl declared. "And you can go ahead with your law business as soon as you like."

"All I have to say is that it is my belief if you are game enough to carry the case into a court, that you will be precious sorry before you get through with it."

"I am not at all afraid of trying it, as you will soon learn," Shelstone declared.

"And now suppose you give me your address, so that the officers can find you tomorrow," he continued.

"There will not be any delay about this matter, for I will push it forward as fast as possible."

"Oh, I ain't afraid to give you my address," the girl declared, in a defiant way.

"I am boarding on Fourth avenue, right across the way from the Cooper Institute. I don't know the number of the house, for I have an awful bad head for numbers, but the lady that keeps the house is named Mrs. Cudliff, so you will not have any trouble in finding me."

The young lawyer took out his memorandum-book and jotted down the address. Then he said, as he returned the book to his pocket:

"I give you fair warning to prepare yourself for trouble, for I most assuredly will bring you into court as soon as the necessary process of the law can be set in motion."

"You will find me ready and willing—more I can't say."

Then the girl made a courtesy to the others and said:

"I hope you will pardon me, ladies and gents, for having to trouble you with this bit of business, seeing that it isn't any concern of yours, but I wanted to show up this 'ere bolting Yankee in his true colors, and there wasn't any other way to do it, as I could see."

"It ar'n't pleasant, but such things have to be done sometimes."

Then she made another courtesy and departed, followed by the two Englishmen, who grinned and ducked their heads as they backed out of the doorway.

"Really, upon my word, this is one of the strangest affairs that ever came under my notice," Mullett declared, as he gazed around him with a look of bewilderment, while the others shook their heads as though deeply perplexed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

STEADFAST FRIENDS.

THE girl's appearance had thrown a most effectual damper upon the party, and all within the apartment showed traces of embarrassment.

"I am very sorry indeed, Mr. Mullett, that this affair happened," the young lawyer remarked.

"But of course it was not through any fault of mine. If I had had any warning that any such accusation was to be brought

against me I would have tried to have the affair taken place elsewhere, but, of course, as the woman said, it was her purpose to disgrace me in the presence of my friends."

"Ah, yes, it is a very unfortunate affair," the old gentleman observed, shaking his head in a solemn way, and assuming an owl-like look of wisdom.

Pauline Mullett had not manifested any particular interest during the affair.

She and her mother sat in one corner of the room, and there was an incredulous look in the eyes of both of the ladies as they listened to the words of the Englishwoman.

Now, though, she judged that it was time for her to speak.

"To be obliged to listen to any such dreadful accusation as this bold young woman made is, of course, extremely disagreeable," Pauline remarked. "But all of us are obliged to put up with unpleasant experiences, and when it is apparent at a glance that there is no truth in the charge we must be able to endure the annoyance with composure."

The old gentleman looked at his daughter in considerable astonishment, while the Frenchmen exchanged meaning glances.

The Russian count sitting well back in one corner of the room had his eyes on the pair and did not fail to notice the looks.

A grateful expression appeared on the face of the young lawyer, as he listened to the words of the young lady.

"I am very much obliged indeed to you, Miss Mullett, for your promptness in declaring your belief in my innocence," Shelstone observed.

"And it is undoubtedly true, as you say, that we are bound in this life to suffer a certain amount of trouble, and therefore, really, we ought not to complain when the trouble comes."

"All that I regret is that the scene took place in your presence."

"You are not to blame for that," Mrs. Mullett declared.

"It was the bold creature's wish to create a disturbance, and make everything as unpleasant for you as possible, but it doesn't amount to anything, and when you get the forward baggage into a law court I don't doubt that you will speedily be able to show what an impudent falsehood she has told."

"Oh, yes, for it will be an easy matter to reach the English minister who performed the ceremony by wire, thanks to the Atlantic cable, and thus obtain all the particulars of the affair," Shelstone declared.

"From the experience of a friend of mine whose wedding I attended in London, I am aware there is a good deal of red tape about English marriages, and there is little doubt but what I will be able to obtain a good description of the man who as Joseph H. Smith married this girl."

"It is a very ugly and disagreeable affair indeed!" Mullett remarked, again assuming the owl-like look of wisdom.

"And, my dear sir, I assure you that I sincerely hope that you will succeed in getting out of it all right, but I am afraid this woman will cause you a deal of trouble," and as the old gentleman finished the speech he shook his head in a mournful way.

This speech did not deceive the young lawyer, for he was perfectly well aware that the Montana man would be delighted if the Englishwoman succeeded in proving that he was her husband, for then it would put an end to the love affair between himself and Pauline.

But Shelstone was too wary to allow the old gentlemen, or any of the rest to see that he doubted the truth of the assertion, so he said, with a graceful bow:

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Mullett, for your good wishes, and in my own mind I have very little doubt but what I shall be able to prove, without much trouble, that this woman's statement is very far from being true. And now I will have to take my departure, as this is one of the cases where the promptest kind of work is required, and a man must not allow the grass to grow under his feet."

"Ah, yes, yes, certainly—I comprehend. There isn't anything like being prompt," the old gentleman observed. "As a successful business man I understand the necessity of a man being careful not to allow any one to get ahead of him."

"I am going to put the detectives to work immediately on the case, and then I will cable at once to England, so I will say adieu!"

And then the gentleman took his departure.

Both mother and daughter accompanied him to the door.

"Oh, Harvey, this accusation does not trouble me in the least, for I know that it isn't true," Pauline declared.

"Certainly it isn't true!" Mrs. Mullett assented, warmly.

"Any one with half an eye could see that that miserable bold creature wasn't telling the truth," the lady continued. "But why she should take the trouble to make such an accusation against you is a mystery."

"I think I understand why she acted as she did," Shelstone remarked. "The woman was hired to make the charge against me; I am the victim of a deep-laid plot, and the object of this accusation was to break off the engagement existing between myself and Pauline."

"Oh, yes; I see—of course!" Mrs. Mullett exclaimed. "How stupid I was not to think of that before."

"Whoever is at the bottom of the plot will only have their labor for their pains, though," Pauline observed, in a tone of quiet determination; "for I am perfectly satisfied now, before any examination is made into the affair, that the story is false from beginning to end."

"The girl is a common, bold, shameless creature, just the one who could be hired to make an accusation of this kind, for so long as she is well paid her conscience would not be apt to trouble her."

"Oh, she is a shameless hussy!" Mrs. Mullett declared, emphatically.

"There isn't any doubt of that," she added. "Just as bold as brass, or else she never would have marched into any one's house as she did into ours on this occasion."

"I am glad that both you and your mother have faith in me, Pauline," the young civil engineer said; his deepening tone showing how he was affected.

"And I assure you that you will never have reason to regret it," he declared.

"Oh, we are quite sure that the woman's story is all a falsehood," Mrs. Mullett remarked. "But I don't doubt though that Mr. Mullett will be only too ready to believe that there is some truth in it."

"Yes, I think that is very likely," Shelstone replied. "People are usually very ready to believe stories which they wish were true."

"Pa has got such a foolish notion into his head about my marrying some foreign nobleman!" the young lady exclaimed with a decided frown.

"Yes, it is really absurd," coincided Mrs. Mullett.

"I do not doubt he would be glad to accept either of these two Frenchmen as a son-in-law," Shelstone observed. "Although, really, all that he knows about them is what they themselves have told him, and they may be a couple of the greatest scamps in existence for all he can tell."

"Yes, that is the truth," the girl observed. "And to my thinking, pa acts real foolish about the matter."

"But one thing is sure, and that is I will not marry any foreigner, no matter whether he is a nobleman or not!" Pauline continued in the most decided way.

"Of course this woman did not take the trouble to make this accusation against me without a motive, and her pretext that she desires to be avenged is all nonsense," the young lawyer argued. "A woman of her stamp would not only wish for vengeance but she would be anxious to make me pay, liberally for deserting her, and one of the first things she would demand would be money."

"Oh, yes, no doubt of it!" Pauline declared. "A girl of this kind—a coarse, common creature, would not have any high-flown notions, and she would certainly be very glad to get all the money out of you that she could."

"Yes, yes! from what I saw of her I feel very sure that she would be willing to do almost anything for money!" Mrs. Mullett declared.

"I do not believe that it will take me very long to get at the truth," Shelstone asserted.

"And you can rest assured that I shall not be satisfied until I have done so!"

Again the mother and daughter assured the young man that they had the most perfect faith in his innocence, and then Shelstone took his departure.

While this conversation was going on in the hall between the three, the gentlemen in the drawing-room had been engaged in discussing the matter.

"Really, this is a most unpleasant affair!" Mullett exclaimed. "And I am excessively annoyed that the young woman should have taken into her head to make her disclosure in my house."

"Yes, to be brought into such an affair is not agreeable," the baron observed. "The gentleman showed considerable courage in denying the woman's statement so promptly, and it was decidedly unfortunate for him though that he could not put anything except his own word against the evidence of the woman's two witnesses." And the Frenchman shook his head and put on a look which seemed to say that he rather believed the English girl's story to be true.

"Young men in a strange country will be foolish enough to get into scrapes of this kind once in a while," the major remarked with an air of great wisdom. "And I am free to confess that if I had been in his place I would have acted in an entirely different manner," he continued in an oracular way.

"I suppose, though, that he did not think there was any danger of the girl's following him across the ocean, but unexpected things of this kind are always happening, and if I had been in his position, I would have tried to have bought the girl off—give her a good sum of money, provided she would agree never to trouble me."

"But, hang it all! it doesn't seem possible to me that there can be any truth in this story!" the mining broker exclaimed.

"I am well acquainted with Shelstone," he affirmed. "And I have always found him to be the squarest kind of a fellow."

"There has never been anything of the wild, high-roller about him, and I cannot bring myself to believe that he could be fool enough to allow any woman of this kind to entrap him."

"She is a very common creature indeed!" the broker's wife declared, disdainfully. "And from what I know of Mr. Shelstone, I do not credit the girl's story at all."

"To me the idea that an educated gentleman of his stamp could possibly take such a fancy as to marry a common, ignorant creature, who was a bar-maid in a tavern, is perfectly incredible," she added.

"Yes, the idea is a surprising one," the baron observed. "But such cases are not at all uncommon," he argued. "Many young English noblemen, with the best blood that Britain can boast within their veins, have so far forgot their high estate as to marry low-born, vulgar girls, bar-maids, singers, and dancers in concert-halls. It seems absurd, but it is a fact."

"Well, from the way the gentleman is going to work, the truth will soon come out," the Russian count observed.

"By using the Atlantic cable, and employing detectives both on this side of the water and the other, he cannot fail to show that the woman's statement is false, if it really is," he continued.

"Ah, yes, he certainly acted as if he was desirous of getting at the truth," the baron observed, in a meditative way.

"And if he does pursue the course which he laid out he undoubtedly will be able to prove the girl's story to be false if it is so," he asserted.

"Still, it must be remembered that if the woman's statement is true, a man obliged to face such an accusation would, in nine cases out of ten, make a bold denial, just as our friend has done," the Frenchman urged, in a specious way.

"Of course, of course!" Mullett exclaimed; "if a man had any pride at all he would certainly deny such a charge as this when publicly made in the presence of his friends."

"It is really a most unfortunate affair, and I deeply regret that it should have occurred," the baron declared.

"The gentleman is almost a stranger to me, but he seems to be a fine young fellow, and it is unfortunate that he should become in-

volved in a miserable scrape of this kind," and the Frenchman shook his head in a melancholy way.

"It is a very great pity that the young woman did not select some other opportunity to make the disclosure," the major observed. "For the affair has certainly been very unpleasant."

At this moment the clock on the mantel chimed the hour, and the professional gentleman at the piano rose to depart, for the time for which he had been engaged had elapsed.

He explained that he had other engagements, or else he would "be charmed" to remain a little longer in such delightful society, and then departed.

The mining broker then suddenly remembered that he had to see a party about an important business matter in half an hour, and begged Mr. Mullett to excuse him.

It was plain that the woman episode had thrown a damper over the entire party.

After the broker and his wife departed—they reached the entry just as the mother and daughter were returning to the dressing-room, and took leave of the two there—the Frenchmen begged to be excused, and after paying their respects to the ladies departed.

Then the Russian count made his adieus. Mullett accompanied him to the door.

The butler was in attendance, and as the Russian passed Crickley he made a sign that he wanted to speak to him, taking care not to allow the host to perceive it.

Mullett, at the door, bid his distinguished guest adieu, pressing him to call again, to which the noble Russian responded that he would only be too delighted, and then as Mullett retreated the butler advanced.

He had a glove in his hand, and stayed the visitor at the door to ask if he had lost it.

Then while the Russian pretended to search his pockets he got a chance to exchange a few rapid words with Crickley.

"How came you to admit the woman and the two men without taking the precautions to find out what was their business?" he asked.

"The Frenchwoman give me orders to be in readiness at the door so that when they came they could gain admittance without any trouble."

"The three are members of the gang, eh?" the disguised detective questioned.

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly!"

"It was the leaders of the gang then who arranged this little surprise party to-night?" Joe Phenix questioned.

"Yes, I suppose so, for I was told to obey any order which might be given me by any one who possessed the pass-word."

"I understand. Well, keep your eyes open!"

"Oh, yes, you can depend upon my doing that!" Crickley declared.

The pretended Russian took his departure.

"This is a cunning move on the part of the rascals," the disguised detective muttered after he got into the street.

"But, unless I am greatly mistaken, it will turn out to be a false one, for it may give me a chance at them."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PAPA GERVAIN.

THE disguised detective proceeded down Broadway and mused upon the situation as he proceeded.

"The motive for this trick is plainly apparent," he remarked, communing with himself, after his usual fashion, as he went on his way.

"They hope by means of this accusation to blast the young man's reputation, so as to make Miss Mullett give him up," he continued.

"The scheme is a very ingenious one, and there is little risk in carrying it out. This Englishwoman and the two men are undoubtedly crooks, and are to be well paid for the part they take in the affair.

"Shelstone will be able to prove, undoubtedly, that he never married the girl, but it will take some time for him to do it, and then the only satisfaction he can get is a suit against the three for slander, for as the woman has been shrewd enough to declare that she doesn't want any money, he can't get a chance to accuse her of blackmail.

"The defense of the three will be that it was all a mistake, of course, that he looked so much like the 'Yankee' who called himself Smith in England, that they were sure that he was the man.

"It will not be possible to punish them, and the only satisfaction that he can get will be in proving the accusation to be a falsehood.

"The affair will get into the newspapers, of course; the rascals who planned the scheme will take care of that, and, altogether, it will be extremely disagreeable for Shelstone. But I fancy they will not be able to shake the confidence of either the daughter or mother in him, although the old gentlemen will undoubtedly do all in his power to break off the match.

"The worst thing about the matter is that at present it gives me no opportunity to get at the gang," and the disguised detective shook his head gravely, as though not at all satisfied.

"As long as the fellows keep on in this careful way I cannot do much.

"They must commit some overt act before I can nab them."

By this time the disguised detective had arrived in the neighborhood of the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and his meditations came to an end.

He strolled through the corridor into the reading-room, took a seat and commenced the perusal of one of the evening journals which he had purchased from a newsboy at the hotel entrance.

Caution had become such a second nature to the indefatigable man-hunter that even while engaged in reading the newspaper he kept a watch to see what was going on around him; and so, before he had read a single column, he became conscious that a man, who had sauntered up within a couple of yards of where he sat, and who pretended to be looking out of the window, was paying more attention to him than a stranger should.

"Now, then, my friend, what are you up to?" the disguised detective muttered under his breath.

"What is your little game?"

And then in a careless way the "Russian count" dropped his paper to his knee, and gazed listlessly out of the window, just as though something which he had read had suggested a train of thought to him.

The stranger immediately pretended to be greatly interested in the street just then, and as he turned his attention from the detective the latter had a good chance to examine him.

He was a short, fat man of fifty-five or thereabouts, with a face as round as an apple, fringed with scanty locks of gray hair.

His upper lip and chin were adorned with a pointed mustache and imperial of the same hue, and a judge of nationalities, at the first glance, would have set him down for a Frenchman.

He was neatly dressed in a dark business-suit, and had that peculiar air which the majority of soldiers acquire after a few years' service.

"Now, then, my friend what are you up to that you manifest such an interest in me?" was the disguised detective's thought.

"Are you some foreign bird of prey—some hawk, speculating in regard to the chances of my turning out to be a profitable victim?"

The stranger, standing sideways, had been watching the disguised detective out of the corner of his eyes, and now, turning in a careless way, he allowed his gaze to fall upon the face of the pretended Russian.

The man was a most excellent actor, for an expression of surprise appeared on his face, just as though he had not noticed the Russian before, and imagined he saw something familiar in his countenance.

Then he smiled, and lifted his hat with courtly politeness.

"Ah, pardon!" he exclaimed, "but have I not had the pleasure of seeing monsieur before?"

He spoke good English, but with accent enough to show plainly that he was a foreigner.

"I cannot recall the circumstances, still I must say that I have seen a face which resembles yours somewhere, although I am

not able to remember exactly where," the Russian replied.

It was the disguised detective's idea to lead the man on so as to discover what kind of game he intended to play.

"It was not in this country!" the other exclaimed with a genuine French shrug of the shoulders.

"Oh, no, it could not have been, for I have only just arrived. It was in Europe—in Paris—dear delightful Paris!" he continued with the true Gallic enthusiasm.

The Russian shook his head.

"I do not think it was Paris," he replied.

"Very true! It does not seem to me that it was in Paris. Bah!" and he tapped his forehead with his right forefinger. "Is it not strange that I cannot remember the exact place?—and I have always so prided myself on my excellent memory."

"Yes, it is rather odd."

"Still, I have been such an extensive traveler I have been in so many places, and have seen so many people that it is not wonderful that my recollection should be at fault once in awhile."

"Yes, I have been an extensive traveler too," the disguised detective remarked.

"Ah, precisely! I would have guessed that from your appearance," the Frenchman remarked.

"I knew the moment that I looked at you that you were not an American."

"Oh, no."

"I will make a guess at your nationality!" the other declared. "I have traveled so much that I flatter myself that I am a good judge in that respect."

"You are not a Frenchman!"

"No."

"Nor yet a German."

"Nor German!"

"And no good judge would ever make the mistake of thinking you are an Englishman."

"Oh, no, decidedly not! There is nothing of the John Bull about me."

"Well, I should take you to be a Russian!" the Frenchman exclaimed with the air of a man who was satisfied that he had made a correct guess.

"You are right. I am a Russian," the disguised detective replied.

"Aha! I was satisfied from the beginning that I could correctly place you!" the Frenchman exclaimed, "beaming" on the pretended Muscovite in the most friendly manner.

"For Russia and its people I have the highest respect," the stranger continued.

"I have spent some time in all the principal cities of your magnificent empire and so I know of what I speak."

"Undoubtedly it was in Moscow, or St. Petersburg, that I met you, the latter the more likely as I have visited the Russian capital a half a dozen times, for at different periods I was attached to the French legation stationed there; I was a member of the diplomatic world, you understand."

The other nodded assent.

"Permit me to tender you my card."

And then with ceremonious politeness, the Frenchman drew out a silver card case, extracted a piece of pasteboard from it, and, with a low bow, presented it to the Russian.

The disguised detective took the card.

The inscription read:

"COLONEL HECTOR GERVAIN."

The Russian pronounced the name, and the Frenchman made an elaborate bow.

"And completely at your service, sir!" he declared.

"Permit me to present you with mine," the Russian remarked, rising and presenting a card, and bowing with equal ceremony.

"Court Orloff Kanoskil!" the Frenchman read from the card.

"My dear count, I assure you that it gives me the greatest pleasure in the world to have the honor of your acquaintance," the Frenchman declared as he seized the other by the hand and shook it warmly.

"But I see now that I was wrong in my supposition that I ever had the honor of your acquaintance, for I am certain that if such had been the case I would not have forgotten you, but the probabilities are that we may have encountered each other in some one of the European cities without being introduced."

"Yes, very likely."

"And I assure you, my dear count, that

though this is our first meeting, yet you seem to me like an old friend!" the Frenchman exclaimed.

"Is that possible?"

"Yes, yes; sit down and I will explain the situation to you."

The Russian resumed his seat, and the Frenchman drew up a chair and sat down facing him.

"You see, my dear fellow, at present I am in that most lonesome of all positions, a stranger, without acquaintances, in a big city."

"Yes, I can understand the feeling. A man who is alone in a great city, with nowhere to go, and no one to talk to, is indeed in an extremely lonesome position."

"Well, possibly I have rather overstated the case; for my daughter, my dear child, Celeste, is with me," the other remarked.

"Oh, then it is not so bad!"

"But she is not very well, poor child; for before taking passage to this country we passed through a series of adventures which seriously shattered her nerves," and the fat Frenchman shook his head in a serious way as he made the announcement.

"That was unfortunate."

Then the colonel took a careful look around, as though he wished to assure himself that there wasn't any one in the neighborhood near enough to play the eavesdropper, after which he hitched his chair a bit nearer to the Russian, and said in a cautious tone:

"Are you connected with the Russian Government?"

"Oh, no."

"Not an officer in the Russian Army, then?" the Frenchman questioned.

"No, I never had any connection with the Government in any way. My father, when a young man, incurred the displeasure of a member of the royal family on a lady's account, and so he remained on his estate in Russian-Poland, and this affair operated as a barrier against my entering the service of the Government in any way."

"Ah, I comprehend!" the Frenchman declared, with a wise shake of the head.

"The man in Russia whose family does not stand in good repute in the imperial court, has very little chance of getting on in public life."

"Almost none at all."

"Well, I have been in public life ever since I was a lad," the Frenchman remarked, in a grandiloquent way.

"I was educated at St. Cyr, which is one of the foremost military schools in France, graduated with a fair degree of honors, and entered the army, but after I had served some five years, an unfortunate affair of honor with a superior officer, wherein I had the good, or bad luck—I don't know exactly which to term it—to wing my man so severely that for a couple of months it was a grave question whether he would live or die, compelled me to resign."

"That certainly seemed to be a misfortune," the disguised detective remarked, and though he had listened with a grave face, paying the utmost attention to the story, yet in his mind he laughed at the idea of the fat old gentleman being the hero of a desperate duel.

"Through the kind offices of some influential friends I secured a position in the diplomatic service, and got along very well. I was lucky enough to make the acquaintance of some charming gentlemen, who professed to be great friends of mine."

"Ah, my dear count! it was a miserable day for me when I met these men," and the colonel heaved a deep sigh.

"Yes, I comprehend," the Russian remarked. "It is not an uncommon thing for a man to wake to the consciousness that his professed friends are sometimes his worst enemies."

"Well, it was not exactly so in this case," the Frenchman observed.

"I could not say with truth that these very agreeable gentlemen were my enemies, yet from the fact that I had enjoyed the pleasure of their society the direct misfortunes befell me," and again the old gentleman sighed in a dismal way.

"You excite my curiosity!" the disguised detective declared, pretending to be greatly interested.

"Pray explain!"

"Yes, I will do so," the other responded.

"These gentlemen—there were half a dozen of them, Frenchmen, Germans and Poles, artists and literary men they were supposed to be, noble, generous fellows, very free with their money, and always disposed to enjoy life to the highest possible extent."

"Ah, yes, I have met with just such gentlemen."

"They sought my society, and we had a royal good time together," the colonel continued.

"I was occupying a public position, of course, being in the diplomatic service, but I never even dreamed that this was one of the reasons why the gentlemen sought my society."

"At times I will admit that we all drank more wine than was good for us, and it is possible that when under the influence of the liquor I babbled of secrets which ought not to have left my lips."

"Yes, yes. When the wine is in the wits are out!"

"But never, knowingly, did I betray a secret of the State Department," the old gentleman asserted.

"When a man has his brain affected by liquor, though, he is apt to betray secrets which otherwise he would not reveal."

"Very true—very true indeed, and I do not doubt that it was so in my case," the Frenchman admitted.

"Well, to come speedily to the end, these five fellows, who pretended to think so much of me, turned out to be a band of socialists—reformers, who proposed to abolish all laws, all rulers, and set up a universal commune."

"That was a discovery indeed," the Russian observed.

"They had set on foot one of the most dangerous conspiracies which had ever been known in France," the old gentleman declared.

"It was their design to murder the French president and all the leading officials, and then inaugurate a second Reign of Terror."

"A bloodthirsty set, and it was an unfortunate thing for you to become associated with them."

"Ah, yes, it certainly proved to be, for when one of the band turned informer and betrayed the conspiracy to the authorities, my name was given as being one of the chief conspirators, so I was arrested with the others."

"That was indeed unlucky."

"Oh, yes," and the old gentleman heaved a deep sigh. "I was thrown into prison, tried and convicted with the rest, for the evidence against me seemed to be so strong that I had a guilty knowledge of the plot, and was also using my official influence to help the conspirators to achieve success, that I was not able to convince my judges that I was an innocent victim."

"I understand," the Russian remarked, with a wise shake of the head. "In a case of this kind judges are usually much more inclined to believe all the accused are guilty than innocent."

"Yes, yes, that is a fact, but it is impossible that you have had any actual experience!" the Frenchman asked.

"Oh, yes, there was a great deal of discontent with the Government among the students at the college where I was educated, and owing to the fact that my father was not in favor at the court I was suspected of being disloyal."

"That suspicion has never died out in the minds of the Government officials, and so as I am constantly watched by police spies from the time I entered Russia until I leave it, and therefore in danger of being arrested at any moment, I seldom return to my native land."

"I do not wonder at it under the circumstances," the old Frenchman remarked.

"It is decidedly unpleasant to be under the apprehension that a police officer is likely to tap you on the shoulder at any moment with the information that you are 'wanted.'"

"Very disagreeable indeed."

"Well, as I remarked, all of us who were caught in the drag-net of the police were convicted and sentenced. Our doom was banishment to the French penal settlement at Cayenne for life."

The distinguished detective shook his head.

"A severe sentence he remarked."

"It was the intention of the authorities

to strike terror into the hearts of the socialists."

"I comprehend."

"Luckily for me I had feathered my nest pretty well during the term of my official position," the old fellow remarked complacently.

"You see, owing to my opportunities for obtaining news of Government actions, likely to affect the stock market, in advance of the public, I was able to speculate in the most successful manner on the Bourse."

"Ah, yes, you possessed a most important advantage."

"And I was far-sighted enough, my dear sir, to invest the bulk of my wealth in England, where it would be safe in case of any political disturbance in France, which might not only cost me my place but force me to seek safety in flight."

"It was wise in you to take this precaution."

"Ah, yes," and the old fellow chuckled. "This is an uncertain world, you know, and it is always well to have an eye to the future."

"Apparently my case was hopeless, and I was doomed to that horrible Cayenne for life, but I had a devoted daughter, and in anticipation that the time might come when I would find myself in trouble, and money would be needed, I had my affairs so arranged that she could command a goodly amount of cash."

"That was a capital idea!" the Russian exclaimed.

"Yes, yes!" and the old fellow rubbed his hands gleefully together.

"Well, my dear count, as you are probably aware, there isn't a country in Europe, with the exception of Russia, where money will do more than it will in France."

The other nodded assent.

"By the skillful use of gold my daughter contrived to effect my escape, and we came to this country, but the adventures which we had in getting out of France would make an exceedingly interesting book."

"I have no doubt of it."

"Of course, as I said, during the term of my official life I managed to feather my nest pretty comfortably, for I was well aware that I must make hay when the sun shone, and so I am able to play the gentleman at leisure now."

"You are fortunate."

"I have plenty for myself, and for my dear child, my beautiful Celeste!"

"By the way, it would give me a great deal of pleasure to make you acquainted with my daughter," the old fellow exclaimed abruptly.

"You are a European like ourselves and very different from these Yankees, of whom I have a very poor opinion."

The disguised detective replied that he would be delighted to make the acquaintance of mademoiselle.

"Have the kindness to come with me then and I will take the pleasure in introducing you," the Frenchman remarked, rising as he spoke.

Joe Phenix also got up.

So far it was a mystery to him as to what game the stranger was endeavoring to play.

That the Frenchman had some deep motive in making his acquaintance he did not doubt, but as yet there was not the slightest indication to show what it was.

The introduction of the daughter, though, he fancied would give him a clue.

Of course the disguised detective did not "take any stock" in the story which the Frenchman had related concerning his adventures.

He believed the recital to be a falsehood from beginning to end, but he did not understand why the man should go to the trouble of concocting such an elaborate yarn.

The only reason, as far as he could see, was that the man judged it to be wise to tell a plausible story in order to gain his confidence.

"He has mistaken his vocation—he should be a writer of romances," the disguised detective muttered as he followed the Frenchman.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DAUGHTER.

As the Frenchman had said, he had indeed very comfortable apartments, which consisted of a parlor and two bedrooms.

The daughter, Celeste, was a rather undersized girl, or woman, for although she was "got up" with exceeding care to appear as young as possible, yet it was plain to the experienced eyes of the detective that she would never see thirty again.

She was not bad-looking, and was dressed with exquisite taste; the jewelry which she wore, too, was worth a small fortune—if the stones were real and not imitations.

But even such a capital judge as the disguised detective would not undertake to say whether the gems were the genuine article or not, for with a good imitation it requires an expert and a dark room to decide the question.

The father introduced the pretended Russian, and the lady received him in the most gracious manner, and before Joe Phenix had been ten minutes in the apartment he came to the conclusion that she was doing her utmost to produce a favorable impression.

"Now, then, what is the game?" was the thought constantly in the detective's mind.

Soon the conversation turned to politics, and the lady speedily made manifest the fact that she was a Red Republican—a Socialist of the deepest dye, and, for a woman, manifested an extremely bloodthirsty disposition.

The old gentleman laughed and appeared to be pleased at his daughter's violent speeches, wherein she demanded the abolition of all Governments, and the distribution of the collected wealth of the civilized world among the common people.

The disguised detective agreed there was too much king-craft in the world, and admitted that it was a shame that money was not more evenly divided, but was by no means inclined to go the lengths which the lady advocated.

Then the lady let fall a remark which gave Joe Phenix an idea in regard to what she was trying to get at.

"I had a thought that as you were a Russian it was possible you might be a member of one of the secret societies which are so common in the domains of the czar."

They suspected him of being a Nihilist, and wished to draw him out.

The detective was surprised, for he had anticipated that some swindling scheme would be tried.

Then the old fellow proposed a game of cards, to which the daughter gleefully assented, provided they played for a small stake, admitting that unless there was a prospect of winning something she took no interest in playing.

Now the disguised detective was sure that the pair intended to fleece him, and that all the talk about the rights of men was but to blind his eyes to the fact that they were a pair of card-sharpers.

Contrary to his anticipations, though, neither the father or daughter tried to get him to play for high stakes, and after a couple of hours, the lady begged to be excused on plea of being tired, and the party broke up.

For once in his life the acute man-hunter, Joe Phenix, was completely puzzled.

CHAPTER XXX.

JOE PHENIX CATCHES ON.

THE old gentleman accompanied the supposed Russian down-stairs, for, as he explained, he was a late bird, and not used to going to bed until after midnight.

When they arrived on the main floor, the Frenchman insisted upon the Russian going with him to the hotel saloon as he protested that he was dying with thirst.

And when the pair stood before the elaborate bar, the old Frenchman ordered a "small bottle" with the air of a prince.

The disguised detective accepted the invitation in the same frank spirit in which it was given.

He had a hope that under the genial influence of the wine, the Frenchman might develop his purpose, so that he might make a guess at the game which the other was trying to play, for as Joe Phenix had got the idea that he was dealing with an uncommonly shrewd and able old rascal, he felt sure that the man had some deep purpose in view in making his acquaintance.

The wine was finished, though without the acute man-hunter being able to pick up a clue.

Then the old gentleman was seized with a desire to play billiards, and invited the Russian to have a game.

The count excused himself on the plea that he was no player, but added he had no doubt that in the billiard-room Monsieur Gervain would find plenty of gentlemen who would be glad to test his skill.

With a pleasant adieu, the old fellow departed.

Joe Phenix had caught sight of his lieutenant, the nervy and shrewd Tony Western, lounging by the door of the saloon, smoking a cigar, and the idea immediately occurred to him that it would be a good notion to put Western on the track.

The disguised detective approached his lieutenant and requested a light.

Joe Phenix's disguise was so perfect that it deceived even the keen and experienced eyes of his own lieutenant, but the moment that his chief spoke, the other recognized his voice.

"Certainly," Tony Western responded, tendering his cigar.

"What is the game now?" Western continued in a careless way, but being careful to lower his voice, so that it was not possible for any one to overhear his words.

"Did you notice that old, fat Frenchman with whom I had a bottle of wine?" Joe Phenix responded in the same careless and cautious way, and apparently busy in lighting his cigar, so that if any one had noticed the two, they never would have imagined that the pair were holding a conversation.

The experienced man-hunter is always a remarkably close and careful observer, and as Tony Western stood in the very front rank of the profession, it was no wonder that he should have taken note of two such out-of-the-common men as the Russian and the Frenchman as they stood in company before the bar, although at the time he had no thought, or suspicion, that he would have anything to do in a professional way with either of them.

"Yes, I saw him."

"The old fellow is up to some game—he and his daughter are staying at the hotel here, and appear to have plenty of money, but it is my impression that they are both crooked, and I want you to keep an eye upon him."

"All right! I will attend to his case."

"His name is Gervain, and his story is that he has been obliged to fly from Paris on account of being implicated in a socialistic conspiracy."

"Ah, yes, that is a nice kind of yarn, but he has the appearance of being anything but a dangerous man."

"It is not very often that I am obliged to own up to being completely puzzled, but I will have to admit that I am in this case," the veteran detective observed.

"Is that possible?" the lieutenant observed in surprise.

"Yes, it is a fact. I am satisfied that this fellow has some game on foot, but I cannot get a clue to it."

"Well, that is certainly odd."

"He went out of his way to make my acquaintance, and then took me up-stairs and introduced me to his daughter, who strikes me as being an extremely shrewd and artful woman."

"She did her best to produce a favorable impression on me, but why the pair took this trouble on my account is a mystery."

"Well, I will do my best to find out what the fellow is up to," Tony Western declared.

"If you find the task to be a difficult one, as I fear it will be, put half a dozen of our best shadows on him."

"I will attend to it."

"It is my wish to get to the bottom of this mystery, for I am satisfied that there is some deep game on foot, but I am decidedly puzzled in regard to just what it is."

"The fellow must be extra smart if I can't get at his scheme with the assistance of the shadows."

Then the disguised detective returned Tony Western's cigar, made a polite bow, and the two parted.

They had managed the affair so well that even if any one had noticed the pair the odds are great that the observer would never have suspected the two had held an important business conversation.

Western proceeded in a leisurely way to

the billiard room, whither the Frenchman had gone, while the disguised detective resumed his seat in the reading apartment and again began the perusal of the evening journal.

Before a quarter of an hour had elapsed Tony Western looked into the reading-room, caught sight of Joe Phenix, sauntered in, and took a vacant chair by his side.

As it happened there wasn't anybody in the immediate neighborhood of where the two sat, so they were able to converse without danger of their conversation being overheard.

"Has this Frenchman any acquaintances in the city?" Tony Western asked.

"No, I should judge not from what he said to me, for he stated that he had just arrived, and spoke as though he did not know a single soul."

"He is playing 'possum then, I think, for when I got into the billiard room I found him busily engaged in a conversation with two well-dressed men who looked like Frenchmen also."

"Describe them!"

Tony Western did so.

"I know the pair!" the disguised detective exclaimed. "They are Frenchmen, and both of them dangerous crooks, I believe. The elder calls himself Baron St. Germain, and the other is known as Major Buffam."

"Yes, those are the men, for I heard the old Frenchman call one of them, baron, and the other, major."

"The mystery is out, I think," the pretended Russian remarked in a reflective way.

"I assumed this disguise for the express purpose of keeping an eye on this precious pair, and in some inexplicable way the fellows have got a suspicion that I am not what I appear to be, and so they put this old Frenchman and his daughter on my track with the idea that they would be able to find out just what sort of a man I was."

"I think you have hit upon the truth," Tony Western remarked. "The thing certainly seems to be reasonable."

"Oh, yes, I don't think there is a doubt but what I am correct."

"After the three had talked for a few minutes the old fellow left them," Tony Western explained.

"I followed him, and he went up stairs—to his room, I presume."

"Probably."

"I hung around the stair-case, for I had a suspicion that it was possible he had arranged for the others to follow him, and my guess was correct, for soon they also came up-stairs, and I shadowed them to the old fellow's room."

"The game is out now. The pair were employed to 'develop' me, but I doubt if they succeeded in the scheme," the veteran detective remarked, with a grim smile.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FEMALE SPY'S IMPRESSION.

TONY WESTERN had not made any mistake in his statement.

The baron and the major had been in waiting in the billiard-room, and after the old Frenchman informed them that he had succeeded in gaining an interview with the mysterious Russian count, it was arranged that they should come to the old fellow's apartment for the purpose of discussing the matter.

All three had been careful to watch for the purpose of seeing if the Russian was anywhere around when they proceeded up-stairs, and as they did not catch sight of him they congratulated themselves upon having eluded his vigilance.

The idea that the Russian might employ spies had also occurred to the men, and so they had kept a wary eye upon all around them, but Tony Western had performed his task in such a superior manner that neither one of the three suspected that a spy had "piped" them off, to use the detective term.

When the baron and the major entered the room they found the old Frenchman and his daughter seated by the center-table, upon which Papa Gervain had placed a bottle of brandy, and a glass apiece for each of the party.

"Sit down, my braves, and make yourselves comfortable!" he exclaimed as the door closed behind the two.

"And as talking is dry work I have provided a little of the water of life to moisten our tongues."

Then as the pair seated themselves, the old fellow filled the glasses.

"I will give you a toast!" Gervain declared. "We will drink success to the noble army of Greeks of which we four are such bright and shining lights."

The brandy was drank with a relish, the woman taking her share with as much gusto as the men, and then the baron began the conversation by saying:

"Now, then, my dear friends, that you have made a careful examination of this Russian, have the kindness to tell me exactly what you think of him?"

He had addressed the remark directly to the old gentleman, although coupling the pair together in his speech, so the woman nodded to the old fellow as a signal for him to answer.

But Gervain shook his head.

"Oh, no, this sort of thing is completely out of my line, you know!" he declared.

"I never set myself up as a judge of character, and so, as I am an honest man, I say to you, frankly, that I am sure that my judgment of the man would not be worth much."

"As far as I can see, he seems to be a well-educated fellow, used to good society, rather inclined to be quiet and uncommunicative, possibly a little dull, still there is a chance that he is one of those deep fellows who is a great deal smarter than he appears."

"Well, Papa Gervain, you certainly have not gained much information," the baron remarked.

"None at all!" the major exclaimed. "We could have told you as much about the man."

"Of course, of course, I am well aware of that fact," the old fellow replied, complacently. "If you remember, I told you right in the beginning, when you suggested the affair to me, that it was rather out of my line; and, although I prided myself upon my ability to relieve a man of his surplus wealth in a neat and gentlemanly way, yet as a spy, and a judge of character, I did not think I would be a success; but my wonderful little woman here might be able to do something."

And after he made this explanation the old fellow proceeded to refill the glasses.

"Well, how is it, Celeste?" the baron asked. "Could you make anything out of the fellow?"

"Oh, yes, I think I can," the woman replied, slowly, and in a thoughtful way.

"Of course, you understand—that I cannot speak in a decided manner," she continued. "All I can do is to give you my impression."

"Certainly! we understand that," the baron responded. "The man is a riddle, no doubt. If he had not been, we would not have had any trouble in deciding about him."

"Yes, he is a deep fellow, and cannot be easily read," the major asserted.

"Long experience has convinced me that I am an expert character reader, but I must admit that this man has completely baffled me," he continued.

"Well, I will give you my impressions," the woman remarked.

"In the first place the man is not a Russian," she asserted.

The others looked surprised.

"Not a Russian?" the baron exclaimed.

"He most certainly appears like one!" the major declared.

"Yes, if he is not a genuine Russ he is a wonderfully good actor," Papa Gervain declared.

"I lived for three years in Russia, and so I have a thorough knowledge of the country and its inhabitants," the woman explained.

"Ah, yes, you certainly ought to be well posted," the baron affirmed.

"And *ma belle* Celeste is one who always keeps her eyes open!" Papa Gervain declared, with an approving nod.

"I went to Russia as the waiting-maid of one of the Russian grand duchesses; I was a girl of sixteen, and after I had been there only a little over a year I was fool enough to marry a young Russian who was the son of a rich merchant."

"Ah, here is a page from the life of our

dear Celeste, of which we had no knowledge!" Papa Gervain exclaimed.

"Well, I am no parrot, and as this period of my life was a particularly disagreeable one, I never cared to speak of it," the woman remarked.

"I thought I had drawn a prize in the matrimonial lottery, not that I cared particularly for the man, for it was on account of his father's wealth that I married him, but soon after I was married, I made the discovery that it was all a lie; the father had a fair business, but was far from being wealthy."

"Ah, yes, young men will tell these little romances when they seek to win a maid who is inclined to be coy," the baron remarked in a quizzical way.

"I was young, then, and thought that, as I had been fool enough to be tricked, it would be wise for me to make the best of the bargain, and so for three years I remained in Russia; then my father-in-law, who was a widower, married again, and the new wife quarreled with me from the beginning, so that my life was rendered intolerable. Just then I met a young Frenchman attached to the French embassy who had known me in Paris."

"I explained to him how I was situated, and he aided me to escape from my slavery. I have never been to Russia since, and never will go, but my residence there gave me so much knowledge in regard to Russia that it is not possible for this man to deceive me."

"Ah, yes, of course I can readily understand that your judgment in regard to the matter must be excellent," the baron observed, and the others nodded their assent.

"It is not possible for me to explain to you why I am sure he is not a Russian," the woman remarked, "but I am certain in regard to the matter."

"I will admit that he represents the character very well indeed, showing that he is an excellent actor, but I am too good a judge to be deceived."

"Well, there is one important point gained then," the baron argued in a thoughtful way.

"The man is not a Russian, consequently it is plain that he is in disguise, and playing a part."

"Yes, in my mind there is not a doubt about it!" the woman declared.

"And now comes the question—why in disguise does he play a part?" the baron asked.

"There are only two reasons for his acting in that way," the major exclaimed.

"He is either a member of the large and noble army of Greeks, like ourselves, a hawk who assumes the disguise of a Russian count that he may be better enabled to secure his prey, or else he is a spy of the police."

"He does not seem to me to be a member of our mystic fraternity," the old gentleman observed.

"Of course, as I admitted, I do not pride myself upon my skill in reading character, still I really believe that if he had been a member of the illustrious band, who gain a living by the use of their wits I would have been able to detect some signs of the hawk in him."

"I agree with Papa Gervain," the major assented. "I do not believe that he is a Greek, for I have never seen anything in his actions to indicate that he is one."

"What say you, Celeste?" the baron observed with a dark frown.

"Oh, no, he is no Greek," the woman exclaimed, decidedly. "I feel quite certain in regard to that."

"Then he is a police spy!" the baron observed with a dark frown.

"Yes, I feel sure of it," she replied. "And it is my judgment that he is a deep and dangerous man."

The men looked at each other for a moment, a grave expression on each face, and then they shook their heads, and it was plain that they were all seriously disturbed.

"This is most unwelcome intelligence," the baron observed slowly, after a long pause.

"Yes, it is indeed," the major affirmed. "For from the fact that he has secured an acquaintance with Mulette, so that he is a welcome visitor at his house, it looks as if the man had got an inkling that we were trying to play a game there."

"Yes, it certainly does!" the woman assented.

"Let us take a glass of brandy all around," the old fellow suggested, "and perhaps the potent liquor will give some ideas to us."

The others nodded and the brandy was drank.

"I have only been in New York a little over a year, and so I am not as well informed in regard to the bloodhounds of the law as I might be," the baron observed, slowly.

"But soon after my arrival, when I inquired of a comrade, who had been in the country some time, and therefore had a good knowledge of the police spies and detectives, he warned me above all to beware of a man-hunter named Joe Phenix, who, he declared, was more dangerous than all the rest put together."

"Yes, that is undoubtedly true," the major assented.

"I was soon to discover from personal experience that this bloodhound was extra dangerous," the baron continued. "For after the first successful trip that I worked this man got on my track, and it was only with a great deal of difficulty that I succeeded in throwing him off."

"Then, just as I was about to embark in this scheme I met some crooks who had even more reason to hate, and fear, Joe Phenix than I had, and we put our heads together to get rid of him."

"And the trick was successfully accomplished too!" the major asserted.

"Well, I supposed that it was," the baron responded, slowly. "But this mysterious Russian puzzles me, for, from what I have heard of the way in which this bloodhound manages his cases, it was his custom to proceed exactly as this supposed Russian is acting."

"But as Joe Phenix is dead it cannot be he," the major argued.

"Yes, that is very true," the baron observed in a thoughtful way.

"I do not think there is any doubt but what he is dead," he continued. "And this man may be one of his associates, but as I have never come in contact with either Joe Phenix or any of his men, I would not be able to recognize the bloodhounds even if they were not disguised."

"Well, as far as I can see, the only thing to be done is to keep close watch on this man and, if he promises to be dangerous, to put him out of the way," the major declared with a dark look.

"It is my impression that he is a most dangerous man and that you cannot be too careful how to proceed in regard to him," the woman urged.

"We will be on our guard; you may be sure of that!" the baron declared.

This ended the conference.

The baron and major withdrew.

They left the hotel and proceeded up Broadway, arm in arm.

"Decidedly, my dear fellow, I think we must get this Russian out of the way before it will be safe to take another step!" the baron exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LIVE YANKEE AGAIN.

Two weeks have elapsed since the day on which the events took place related in our last chapter, and during that time considerable of interest to the characters in our tale has transpired.

The reader will remember that the young lawyer, Shelstone, left the house of the Montana man, smarting under the unexpected accusation made by the Englishwoman, and determined to set the detectives to work to prove that the charge was utterly unfounded.

He meant what he said when he declared that he would set the bloodhounds of the law immediately to work.

As the counsel for the railway company he had chanced to make the acquaintance of the chief of police, and so he sought to obtain the advice of that gentleman.

The superintendent listened attentively to his story, and then informed him how to go ahead.

As it happened a fast steamer of one of the crack English lines was to sail at an early hour on the following morning; and on this ship a Headquarters detective had taken passage on a special mission to London.

"This gentleman can just as well attend to your business as not, as he will be obliged to remain in London for a week or more," the chief of police remarked.

So when the steamer sailed in the morning the detective carried with him an accurate photograph of Shelstone, and his signature.

As the superintendent explained:

"On the occasion of a wedding ceremony at an English church, the parties are obliged to sign their names, and so it will be an easy matter for my man to compare your writing with the signature of the man who really married this woman."

The steamer made a quick trip, and on the seventh day from the one on which he sailed the detective was in London, and on the eighth day the superintendent received a cable message from his man.

"No resemblance between the signatures," the detective wrote. "Smith writes an awful list. Rector remembers the parties, as all were under the influence of liquor, and he hesitated to marry them, but yielded to the woman's solicitations, as she said the man was going to America the next day, and if she wasn't married to him she couldn't go. The groom was an under-sized, cockney Englishman, not at all like Shelstone's portrait. It is a sure-enough plant."

When the young lawyer called at the Mullett mansion and exhibited this dispatch, bearing the signature of one of the best known of all the New York detectives, even old Mullett was forced to admit that it was a complete refutation of the woman's accusation.

Urged on by the Frenchman, the old gentleman had attempted to carry matters with a high hand in his household in regard to the young lawyer, but in his wife and daughter he found foemen worthy of his steel, and though Mullett had made an unusually bold fight for five or six days, yet the odds against him were too great, and the women had succeeded in making him dislike to discuss the subject.

And then when the cable dispatch came the pair assailed him with such vigor as to make him really weary; and he dared not offer any more objections to Shelstone's engagement to his daughter.

At first the young lawyer was inclined to make an attempt to punish the three conspirators who had made such a bold attack on his good name, but all the Mullett family begged him not to take any more notice of the "vile creatures;" they were afraid that they would be brought into court, and they had a natural dislike for that sort of thing.

Then, too, when Shelstone came to look the case over it was not apparent to him how he would be able to do much, for the three, when brought to book, would be sure to swear that they acted without malice, being deceived by a strong resemblance, so he concluded to take no further steps in the matter.

The Frenchmen, of course, had taken pains to keep themselves well informed in regard to the affair, and when they learned the particulars of the cable dispatch they understood that the scheme to destroy the good name of the young lawyer had failed.

Of course, the two were at the bottom of the attack, for it was they who had hunted up the Englishwoman, and hired her with her companions, to make the charge.

All three were imported crooks, and one of the men was the woman's husband.

The plotters were in "hard luck," to use the common phrase, for not only had this highly elaborate scheme fallen through, but the mysterious Russian count, who had been such a puzzle to them, had suddenly disappeared.

No one knew anything about him.

In a guarded way the hotel people were questioned, but all they could say was that the gentleman called for his bill, paid it, and departed without saying where he was going.

Mullett was cross-examined, but he was surprised to learn that the count had vanished in such a mysterious manner.

"But he struck me as being a very queer fellow," Mullett remarked. "I thought so from the first time I met him; very quiet and reserved, but then I supposed that was a way these Russians have."

The conspirators were somewhat alarmed, at first by this mysterious disappearance.

If the man was a police spy in disguise had he been wise enough to discover that he was suspected, and so judged it was prudent for him to take himself off?

Or had they made a mistake about the matter, and attached an importance to the man which was not warranted by the facts in the case?

They were in a quandary but resolved to keep an extra good lookout, so as to be prepared for the approach of danger.

Just at this time Miss Mullett took it into her head to study German, and a tall, gaunt professor, with long, iron-gray hair, and a ministerial look, possibly due to the glasses which he constantly wore, was employed.

It was merely a "fad" of Miss Pauline's, so everybody thought, but she, apparently, was in earnest, for the professor came three times a week, and remained with his pupil for an hour each time.

A little circumstance of this kind did not excite the attention of the conspirators, for they did not deem the fact of any importance.

They were a little puzzled how to proceed, for by this time they had come to the conclusion there was not much chance that either one of them would be able to do anything with the girl.

She was so attached to the young lawyer it was folly to expect to separate the two.

The major had talked in a rather wild manner of scheming to get the girl in such a compromising situation that she would be forced to marry him to preserve her reputation, but when they came to discuss the matter, endeavoring to hit upon some plan whereby such a result could be brought about, they were not able to arrange any scheme.

"Ah, well, I suppose we will have to give the idea up," the baron remarked in a disgusted way. "And the only chance left for us to make a stake out of this affair is to get old Mullett into a game and bleed him as heavily as possible."

"Yes, it really seems as if that was about all we can do," the major assented.

"We could crack old Mullett's safe easily enough," the baron observed. "But I doubt if we would get enough out of it to pay us for our trouble, for the old fellow is not in the habit of keeping any great stock of money, or jewelry in the house."

"Suppose we set our spies to work to ascertain as nearly as they can what the safe does contain," the major suggested. "And then we will be able to tell whether it will be worth while for us to take the trouble to crack the crib."

The baron thought this was a good idea, and said as much.

So orders were issued to the spies whom the gang had introduced into the Mullett household, to keep their eyes open and ascertain as nearly as possible what valuables were in the safe. Therefore all the spies in the house were on the alert, and it was due to this fact that a discovery was made which filled the hearts of the gang with joy.

Abner Jones, the Live Yankee, called upon Mullett in the evening two or three days after the one on which the conversation between the two Frenchmen had taken place.

Mullett was enjoying a cigar in the library and reading one of the evening newspapers.

When Jones's name was brought to him he directed the gentleman to be ushered into the library.

As the Live Yankee was one of his old chums the Montana man was always glad to see him, although he rather stood in dread of his caustic tongue.

Jones swung the door carelessly back to its place after he entered, but was not careful to latch it, so that it stood an inch or so ajar, and as Mullett's valet, the soft and oily Englishman, McAdie, happened to pass by just after Jones entered the room, the words of the Live Yankee came distinctly to his ears:

"I say, Mullett, have you got a safe in the house?" Jones questioned.

The Englishman immediately pricked up his ears, as the saying is, and paused to listen.

"A safe?" exclaimed Mullett, as though he doubted whether he had heard aright.

"Yes, a safe, where you keep your valuables, you know?"

"Why, certainly, of course!" Mullett exclaimed.

"I have a very fine parlor-safe up-stairs, in the room next to my sleeping apartment," the old gentleman continued, with a flourish.

Since his rise to wealth he delighted to use high-flown expressions.

"Well, I had an idea that you had a safe, and I've got ten thousand dollars here that I want to put in it for three or four days," the Live Yankee remarked, as he helped himself to a chair.

It was as much as the Englishman could do to keep from uttering a low whistle, indicative of astonishment and satisfaction as these words came to his ears.

"Ten thousand dollars, eh?" Mullett asked, in surprise.

"Yes, I have it in my pocket in hundred-dollar bills," Jones replied. "I got it by selling some stocks to-day."

"I made a deal with a man for a piece of property, and was to pay the money over this afternoon, but instead of the man putting in an appearance according to agreement, he sent me a letter saying that he was sick and couldn't come to town for a day or two, so I was left with the money on hand."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"I was rather puzzled just what to do with it until he does come," the Live Yankee explained.

"I don't do any business with any of these Eastern banks, you know."

Mullett nodded assent.

"I could put it in the hotel safe, but I am a little skeery about trusting so much money as ten thousand dollars to the tender mercies of these hotel clerks."

"Yes, yes, I understand!" the old gentleman exclaimed. "Those fellows have been known to run off with the cash, and I should hate to risk so large a sum of money as that."

"Exactly!" the Live Yankee exclaimed. "That is just the way I looked at it. I don't propose to put it in the power of any man to skedaddle with my little ten thousand."

"You are right. I would not be willing to run any such risk."

"While I was debating what I had better do with the money, I happened to think of you, and the idea struck me that it was mighty probable you had a safe, and if you had I knew you would not object to my putting the money in it for two or three days, for the fellow wrote that he was certain to show up in that time."

"Of course, you are quite welcome to the accommodation, and there is no doubt but what it will be quite safe."

"One big point is that no one will know that it is here," the Live Yankee observed, shrewdly.

"Yes, yes, that is true," Mullett coincided.

And these two speeches made the listener at the door chuckle merrily to himself; a noiseless laugh, but full of glee.

"I don't suppose that you are in the habit of stuffing your safe with valuables," Jones remarked.

"Oh, no; I am not one of the men who believes in keeping much money in the house," the old gentleman responded.

"The women folks keep their jewelry in it, and I have some important papers, but no cash."

"I think you are right," the Live Yankee remarked. "If a man is in the habit of keeping a large amount of valuables in his safe some of the servants are certain to find out about it sooner or later, then they gossip, and some crooks find out that the safe is worth robbing, and the first thing you know the house is plundered."

"Oh, yes, no doubt about it!"

"Well, suppose we lock the cash up, and then there will be a weight taken off my mind," Jones remarked, rising to his feet.

The spy waited to hear no more, but hastened to retreat so as not to be caught eavesdropping.

He had made an important discovery.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE COIL TIGHTENS.

THIRTY hours after the time when the events related in our last chapter took place and we come to the "small hours" of the morning.

The clocks of the metropolis pointed to the hour of two, and upper Broadway in the

neighborhood of the Alhambra flats, was deserted.

"The policeman had passed, walking his 'beat,' about half-an-hour before, and only the uncertain footfalls of some belated wayfarer broke the stillness of the night.

Then up the street came a couple of well-dressed men.

They entered the Alhambra building, being provided with night-keys, with the air of of people who had perfect right to do so.

It was the baron and the major.

McAdee was in waiting to receive them, and so they gained admittance to the Mullett apartments without any trouble.

"Everything is all serene," the Englishman remarked. "They all went to the theater to-night, and had a regular blow-out, oysters and champagne when they came home, so they didn't go to bed until after twelve, and you can depend upon them all sleeping so jolly sound that there will not be any danger of their being disturbed by our operations."

"What kind of a safe is it?" the baron asked.

"Oh, it is a cheap, common affair, that the old man picked up somewhere for almost nothing," McAdee replied.

"The tools will go through it, then, as though it was so much cheese," the baron decided.

"I don't believe that it will take you a quarter of an hour to drill a hole so as to strike the combination, then you are all right," the spy remarked.

"The old man and woman sleep in the adjoining room, I believe!" the major assumed.

"Yes, but there is a closet between the two, with two good solid doors, so that if we are at all careful we are not likely to disturb them," the valet explained.

"That is good and we ought to be able to do the trick without any trouble," the baron averred.

"Oh, yes, it will be as easy a job as I ever saw," McAdee asserted.

Then he led the way to the apartment where the safe stood.

As the valet was provided with false keys he had no trouble in gaining admittance to the room.

Once in the apartment the valet lighted the gas and then turned the key in the lock of the closet door.

"If we should happen to disturb the old duffer, and he comes to see what the matter is, he will not be able to rush right in on us," McAdee explained, with a grin.

Then the Frenchman examined the safe, the baron taking from a secret inside pocket of his coat a fine assortment of burglars' tools, so constructed as to fold up to be stowed away in a small place.

"This is a flimsy affair," the baron assumed, "and it will be very little trouble to crack this strong box."

"Lucky for us, for if it had been one of the new models it would have bothered us to crack it without powder or dynamite, and it wouldn't do to try a game of that kind under the circumstances," the major observed.

"Certainly not," the baron assented, as he set to work with the tools.

The others watched him eagerly.

The three were expert cracksmen, and they had not made any mistake about the worthlessness of the safe.

In less than fifteen minutes the baron had completed the job, and the safe door swung open.

A cry of satisfaction came from the confederates as they caught sight of the package of bank-bills.

"There are the ten thousand flimsies, sure enough!" the valet cried. "Oho! isn't this a haul worth making!"

"Ah, yes. Lucky thing for us the man took the notion into his head to put his money here," the baron remarked, as he took the package in his hand and arose to his feet.

"Not so lucky as you think!"

The three started in alarm; they had their backs to the door by which they had entered, but turning they discovered that the door was open, and in the entrance stood a tall, muscular, resolute-looking man, while behind him were three policemen with leveled revolvers.

Under the impulse of the moment the three crooks clapped their hands on their weapons,

and when he perceived this, Joe Phenix—for it was the invincible Phenix in truth—cried out in stern warning:

"Don't attempt resistance or your blood will be upon your own heads!"

A moment the cracksmen glared at the police; then, realizing that it would be indeed the height of folly to resist, sullenly withdrew their hands from their weapons.

"That is right, my men," Joe Phenix remarked, approvingly. "Under the circumstances it would be very stupid to show fight, and you might be in a much worse position than you are at present, for safe-breaking is not a hanging offense."

"Put the bracelets on, officers!"

When this operation was completed, and the prisoners were thus secure, the baron, demanded:

"What is your name?"

"Phenix."

"As I thought!" the Frenchman cried, with bitter accept. "Was this a trap?"

"It was, but if you hadn't been a trio of rascals you would not have been caught in it!" the man-hunter rejoined.

"Ah, well, it is a long lane which has no turning, and my time will come!" the Frenchman hissed.

"That is right! Keep your courage up, but threatened men live long!" Phenix retorted.

The three confederates were tried, convicted and sent to do the State some service at Sing Sing's famous prison.

Old Mullett was astounded and his wife and daughter attacked him so bitterly that he was glad to stop their tongues by proposing that Pauline and the young lawyer should be wedded immediately.

So the ceremony took place, and Shelstone insisted upon the veteran detective being his "best man." Now although the man-hunter always shrunk from public performances of this kind, yet on this occasion he was obliged to consent.

It was like the celebration of his victory over the gang.

THE END.

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